

Overview

Stomach ulcer

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Stomach ulcers (gastric ulcers) are open sores that develop on the lining of the stomach.

Ulcers can also happen in the part of the intestine beyond the stomach. These are duodenal ulcers.

Stomach and duodenal ulcers are sometimes called peptic ulcers.

Symptoms of stomach ulcers

The most common symptom of a stomach ulcer is a burning or a dull, constant pain in the centre of the abdomen (tummy).

Stomach ulcers are not always painful.

Some people may have other symptoms such as indigestion, heartburn and feeling sick.

Contact your GP if you think you have a stomach ulcer.

[Find out more about symptoms of stomach ulcers](#)

Causes of stomach ulcers

Stomach ulcers happen when the layer that protects the stomach lining from stomach acid breaks down. The stomach lining can then get damaged.

This is usually a result of:

- an infection with *Helicobacter pylori* (H. pylori) bacteria
- taking non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen or aspirin, for a long time or at high doses

Stress or certain foods do not usually cause stomach ulcers.

[Find out more about the causes of stomach ulcers](#)

People affected by stomach ulcers

Stomach ulcers can affect people of any age, including children. But mostly people aged 60 or over. Stomach ulcers affect men more than women.

Treating stomach ulcers

Treatment will depend on what is causing the ulcer. Most stomach ulcers will heal in a month or two.

Your GP will usually prescribe a medicine called a proton pump inhibitor (PPI). This reduces the amount of acid the stomach produces so the ulcer can heal itself.

If an H. pylori infection causes the ulcer, your GP will prescribe [antibiotics](#). This should kill the bacteria and stop the ulcer from coming back.

If the use of NSAIDs causes the ulcer, your GP will prescribe PPIs. They may recommend alternative medicine to NSAIDs, such as paracetamol.

Stomach ulcers can come back after treatment.

[Find out more about treating stomach ulcers](#)

Complications of stomach ulcers

Complications of stomach ulcers are rare. But they can be very serious and become life-threatening.

The main complications include:

- bleeding at the site of the ulcer
- the stomach lining at the site of the ulcer splitting open (perforation)
- the ulcer blocking the movement of food through the digestive system (gastric obstruction)

[Find out more about the complications of stomach ulcers](#)

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