

GASTRITIS

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Gastritis

What is gastritis?

Also called dyspepsia, gastritis is an inflammation of the lining of the stomach. It can occur suddenly (acute) or gradually (chronic). Chronic gastritis occurs in two out of every 10,000 people, whereas acute gastritis is more common, occurring in eight out of every 1,000 people.

What causes gastritis?

Gastritis can be caused by irritation due to excessive alcohol use, chronic vomiting, stress, or the use of certain medications, such as aspirin or anti-inflammatory drugs. It may also be caused by any of the following:

- **Helicobacter pylori:** A bacteria that lives in the mucous lining of the stomach. Without treatment, the infection can lead to ulcers and, in some people, stomach cancer.
- **Pernicious anemia:** A form of anemia that occurs when the stomach lacks a naturally occurring substance needed to properly absorb and digest vitamin B12.
- **Bile reflux:** A backflow of bile into the stomach.
- **Infections caused by bacteria and viruses.**
- **Autoimmune disorders.**

If gastritis is left untreated, it can lead to severe blood loss or, in some cases, increase the risk of developing stomach cancer.

What are the symptoms of gastritis?



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Symptoms of gastritis vary among individuals, and in many people there are no symptoms. However, the most common symptoms include:

- Nausea
- Abdominal bloating
- Vomiting
- Indigestion
- Hiccups
- Loss of appetite
- Vomiting blood or coffee ground-like material
- Black, tarry stool

How is gastritis diagnosed?

After reviewing your personal and your family's medical history as well as performing a thorough physical evaluation, your doctor may recommend any of the following tests to diagnose gastritis:

- **Endoscopy.** The doctor eases an endoscope, a thin tube containing a tiny camera, through your mouth and down into your stomach to look at the stomach lining. The doctor will check for inflammation and may perform a biopsy, a procedure in which a tiny sample of tissue is removed and then sent to the laboratory for analysis.
- **Blood test.** The doctor may check your red blood cell count to determine whether you have anemia, which means that you do not have enough red blood cells.
- **Stool test.** This test checks for the presence of blood in your stool, a sign of gastritis.

Should I have my blood tested for levels of certain vitamins and minerals if I have gastritis?

If you have a gastrointestinal disease that leads to significant malabsorption, your doctor may measure some of the levels of vitamins and minerals in your blood. Atrophic gastritis, for example, is a condition which specifically leads to the malabsorption of vitamin B12. This vitamin can be measured in your blood if atrophic gastritis is suspected.

If your routine laboratory tests (including a complete blood count and a chemistry panel) are normal, you do not need a measurement of your blood vitamin or mineral levels. If you are taking a medication such as a diuretic (water pill), your doctor is most likely monitoring the level of potassium in your blood already.

If you are found to be anemic and your doctor believes it is a result of a nutrient deficiency, he or she may measure the level of iron in your blood. Iron, in fact, is the only mineral for which blood levels correlate with the total amount of iron stored in your body. Other minerals such as sodium, potassium, phosphorous, calcium, and magnesium, are found predominantly in the cells of your body, so blood levels of these nutrients can, at times, be misleading.

How is gastritis treated?

Treatment for gastritis usually involves taking antacids and other drugs to reduce stomach acid, which causes further irritation to inflamed areas. These medications will help relieve symptoms and promote healing. Your doctor will also recommend that you avoid foods and beverages that aggravate symptoms (such as hot or spicy foods). Also, avoiding nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) could help.

For gastritis caused by *Helicobacter pylori*, your doctor will prescribe antibiotics. Once the underlying problem disappears, gastritis usually does, too. You should talk to your doctor before stopping any medicine or starting any gastritis treatment.

What is the prognosis for gastritis?

Most cases of gastritis improve quickly once treatment has been started.

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