

HELICOBACTER PYLORI AND STOMACH CANCER

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What Do I Need to Know About H. Pylori and Cancer Risk?

Helicobacter Pylori and Stomach Cancer



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A bacterial infection called *Helicobacter pylori* (*H. pylori*) is now recognized as a primary cause of peptic ulcers and their recurrence. Evidence has been found linking the changes caused by *H. pylori* infection in the stomach lining as a strong risk factor for stomach cancer.

When an *H. pylori* infection is identified, it can be treated with antibiotics. Testing for *H. pylori* is a way to decrease the incidence of stomach cancer. Simple blood or breath tests to check for *H. pylori* antibodies are available and can be easily done. People who have a family history of stomach cancer or other cancer risk factors can be screened for *H. pylori* infection with these tests.

A dramatic decline has occurred in the past several decades in the number of stomach (also called gastric) cancer cases. This drop in stomach cancer rates may be thanks to improved detection and treatment, as well as improved dietary habits — studies show that a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and fibers lowers the risk for many cancers. But if stomach cancer is not caught early before it has spread, the prognosis is poor and the disease may be fatal.

What Do I Need to Know About H. Pylori and Cancer Risk?

H. pylori can infect the lining of the stomach, and result in symptoms such as stomach pain, food intolerances from chronic inflammation, and occasionally bleeding from a gastric ulcer. However, the *H. pylori* infection often does not cause any symptoms. *H. pylori* infection is treated with a combination of antibiotics and acid-reducing medication. The *H. pylori* infection is usually eradicated, but all prescribed doses of antibiotics must be taken.

Your doctor will determine if you need to be screened for *H. pylori* infection. If you have a strong family history of stomach cancer as well as other cancer risk factors, even though you don't have symptoms of a stomach ulcer, your doctor may recommend being tested for *H. pylori* antibodies. In addition to screening, your doctor may suggest some lifestyle changes, such as including more fruits, vegetables, and fiber in your diet. Regular checkups with your doctor and following his or her recommendations can reduce your cancer risk.

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