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Patient education: Gastritis (The Basics)

[Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate](#)

What is gastritis?

"Gastritis" means inflammation of the stomach lining ([figure 1](#)).

Some people have gastritis that comes on suddenly and lasts only for a short time. Doctors call this "acute" gastritis. Other people have gastritis that lasts for months or years. Doctors call this "chronic" gastritis.

What causes gastritis?

Different things can cause gastritis, including:

- An infection in the stomach from bacteria called "H. pylori"
 - Medicines called "nonsteroidal antiinflammatory drugs" (NSAIDs) – These include [aspirin](#), [ibuprofen](#) (brand names: Advil, Motrin), and [naproxen](#) (brand names: Aleve, Naprosyn).
 - Drinking alcohol
 - Conditions in which the body's infection-fighting system attacks the stomach lining
 - Having a serious or life-threatening illness
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What are the symptoms of gastritis?

People with gastritis have no symptoms. When people do have symptoms, they are due to other conditions that can happen with gastritis, like ulcers. Symptoms from ulcers include:

- Pain in the upper belly

- Feeling bloated, or feeling full after eating a small amount of food
 - Decreased appetite
 - Nausea or vomiting
 - Vomiting blood, or having black-colored bowel movements
 - Feeling more tired than usual – This happens if people with gastritis get a condition called "anemia."
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Should I call my doctor or nurse?

Call your doctor or nurse if:

- You have belly pain that gets worse or doesn't go away
 - You vomit blood or have black bowel movements
 - You are losing weight (without trying to)
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Will I need tests?

Probably. Your doctor or nurse will ask about your symptoms and do an exam. They might also do:

- An upper endoscopy – During this procedure, the doctor puts a thin tube with a camera on the end into your mouth and down into your stomach ([figure 2](#)). they will look at the inside of your stomach. During the procedure, they might also do a test called a biopsy. For a biopsy, the doctor takes a small sample of the stomach lining. Then another doctor looks at the sample under a microscope.
- Tests to check for H. pylori infection. These can include:
 - Blood tests
 - Breath tests – These tests measure substances in your breath after you drink a special liquid.
 - Tests on a small sample of your bowel movement
- Blood tests to check for anemia

How is gastritis treated?

Treatment depends on what's causing your gastritis.

For example, if NSAIDs are causing your gastritis, your doctor will recommend that you not take those medicines. If alcohol is causing your gastritis, they will recommend that you stop drinking alcohol.

Doctors can use medicines to treat gastritis caused by an *H. pylori* infection. Most people take 3 or more medicines for 2 weeks. The treatment includes antibiotics plus medicine that helps the stomach make less acid.

Doctors can use medicines that reduce or block stomach acid to treat other causes of gastritis ([table 1](#)). The main types of medicines that reduce or block stomach acid are:

- Antacids
- Surface agents
- Histamine blockers
- Proton pump inhibitors

If your doctor recommends acid-reducing treatment, they will tell you which medicine to use.

What happens after treatment?

Sometimes, people who are treated for an *H. pylori* infection need follow-up tests to make sure the infection is gone. Follow-up tests include breath tests, lab tests on a sample of bowel movement, or endoscopy.

More on this topic

[Patient education: *H. pylori* infection \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Upper endoscopy \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Peptic ulcers \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Stomach ache and stomach upset \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Brand versus generic medicines \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Anemia caused by low iron \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Upper endoscopy \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

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GRAPHICS

Upper digestive tract



The upper digestive tract includes the esophagus (the tube that connects the mouth to the stomach), the stomach, and the duodenum (the first part of the small intestine).

Graphic 55616 Version 6.0

Upper endoscopy

During an upper endoscopy, you lie down and the doctor puts a thin tube with a camera and light on the end (called an endoscope) into your mouth and down into your esophagus, stomach, and duodenum (the first part of your small intestine). The camera sends pictures from inside your body to a television screen. That way, your doctor can see the inside of your esophagus, stomach, and duodenum.

Graphic 75392 Version 4.0

Medicines used to reduce stomach acid

Medicine type	Medicine name examples
Antacids*	Calcium carbonate (sample brand names: Maalox, Tums)
	Aluminum hydroxide, magnesium hydroxide, and simethicone (sample brand name: Mylanta)
Surface agents	Sucralfate (brand name: Carafate)
Histamine blockers ¶	Famotidine (brand name: Pepcid)
	Cimetidine (brand name: Tagamet)
Proton pump inhibitors	Omeprazole (brand name: Prilosec)
	Esomeprazole (brand name: Nexium)
	Pantoprazole (brand name: Protonix)
	Lansoprazole (brand name: Prevacid)
	Dexlansoprazole (brand name: Dexilant)
	Rabeprazole (brand name: AcipHex)

* Some antacids contain aspirin, which can increase the risk of internal bleeding. Examples of antacids with aspirin include Alka-Seltzer, Medi-Seltzer, and Neutralin. But there are others, too, so it's important to check labels. Talk to your doctor or nurse before taking any medicines that contain aspirin.

¶ Another histamine blocker, ranitidine (brand name: Zantac), stopped being sold in 2020. That's because it was found to sometimes contain a substance that could increase a person's risk of cancer if they took a lot of it over time. If you have any of this medicine in your home, you should stop taking it and throw away any that is left over. Ask your doctor or nurse about what other medicine you can use instead.

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