



## Helicobacter Pylori

### **What is Helicobacter pylori?**

Helicobacter pylori, is the most common chronic bacterial infection in humans. Conservative estimates indicate that the bacteria is present in the stomach in approximately 50% of the world's population. The majority of people infected with H. pylori infection have no symptoms and will never develop symptoms. However, H.pylori is capable of causing a number of gastrointestinal disorders including ulcers and, rarely, stomach cancer.

### **How common is H.pylori infection?**

Infection is rarely found before age 10. However, it increases to up to 10% in those between ages 18 to 30 and up to 50 percent in those older than age 60.

### **How are people infected with H.pylori?**

Spread is from person to person in early childhood through oral-oral or fecal-oral exposure. H.pylori is carried in saliva and faeces.

### **How does H.pylori infection cause symptoms?**

H.pylori disrupts a protective layer of mucous and causes the release of certain enzymes and toxins that may directly or indirectly cause injury to the cells of the stomach or duodenum. The net effect of these changes is that H.pylori makes underlying tissues more vulnerable to damage by digestive juices, such as stomach acid. This results in chronic inflammation in the walls of the stomach (gastritis) or duodenum (duodenitis). Most individuals with chronic gastritis or duodenitis have no symptoms. However others can develop stomach or duodenal ulcers. Less commonly, chronic gastritis can progress to abnormal cellular changes (metaplasia) that can lead to certain forms of cancer. Cancer developing as a result of H.pylori infection is very uncommon.

### **Patients with the following problems should be tested for H.pylori and treated**

- ◆ **Stomach or Duodenal ulcers** – currently or previously
- ◆ **Indigestion with a normal Gastroscopy – functional dyspepsia**
- ◆ **Family history of stomach cancer**
- ◆ **Stomach lymphoma**– currently or previously
- ◆ **Severe Gastritis**, especially if metaplasia or dysplasia (cell changes) are present
- ◆ Patients on long term anti inflammatory arthritis drugs (NSAID's).

### **How is H. Pylori diagnosed?**

- ◆ Blood tests — Blood tests known as serology tests
- ◆ Breath tests — Breath tests containing a substance (13C [carbon]- or 14C-labeled urea)
- ◆ Stool tests — Tests are available that detect the presence of H.pylori proteins in stool.
- ◆ Endoscopy — Tissue samples (biopsies) are obtained from the stomach and are evaluated for H. pylori.

### **How is H.pylori treated?**

Treatment involves taking several medications (two antibiotics along with an acid reducing medication for 1 week) Current available treatment packs include **NEXIUM Hp7** and cures infection in up to 90% of people. If you are **ALLERGIC to Penicillin** a different regime will be provided. Side effects are seen in up to 50% of patients undergoing therapy to cure H. pylori infection. Fortunately, side effects associated with H. pylori therapy are usually mild; less than 10% of patients stop treatment due to side effects. Probiotics such as Yakult can help.