

Do You Need Antacids? Will You Get Stomach Cancer?

The title of this article may seem like an odd pairing of concepts, but it is unfortunately quite true. If you take antacids, whether over the counter or doctor prescribed, you are in very good company. Antacids are the #1 drug taken in this country. Like many medications taken, antacids are wonderful in relieving the bothersome symptom, yet do very little to address the underlying cause of the problem.

What if the antacid you or a friend is taking is really masking evil bacteria that could not only destroy your stomach but perhaps lead to cancer? You'd want to know, wouldn't you? Well, read on!

First let's discuss what symptoms you might be having. They are quite variable but can include the following:

- Heartburn
- Pain or discomfort (usually in the upper abdomen)
- Bloating
- An early sense of fullness with eating
- Lack of appetite
- Nausea
- Difficulty swallowing
- Reflux
- Chest pain
- Vomiting
- No symptoms - a vast number fall into this category.

(As some of the above can be related to other disease processes, you always want to be checked by your doctor to rule out any other possible causes.)

It seems fitting that one of the most common symptoms, heartburn, should be caused, potentially, by one of the most common chronic bacteria in humans.

The name of this bacterium is *Helicobacter pylori*, or *H. pylori* for short. Conservative estimates indicate that the bacterium is present in the stomach of approximately ½ of the world's population. Surprisingly, the importance of *H. pylori* was not appreciated until 1982. *H. pylori* is now recognized to be the most common cause of gastric (stomach) and duodenal (upper small intestine) ulcers.

H. pylori causes a number of changes to the normal environment of the stomach and upper small intestine. It disrupts the mucous layer and causes the release of certain enzymes and toxins that may directly or indirectly cause injury to the cells of the stomach and upper small intestine.

H. pylori is not only capable of causing a number of gastrointestinal disorders, including ulcers, but it can also cause stomach cancer. It is thought that the chronic inflammation of the cells in the stomach (chronic gastritis) can progress to abnormal cellular changes that can lead to certain forms of cancer. This form of cancer is not terribly common.

H. pylori is most likely spread from person to person through oral-oral or fecal-oral exposure since *H. pylori* may be carried in saliva and feces (stool).

Detection

The most important thing is to find out if you have a H. pylori infection. There are blood tests available but they are not all equal in their ability to detect the problem. There is the risk of a false negative in the most common blood test used. In other words, the test comes back negative, but you do have the infection.

If you have any of the above symptoms, it may be critical to your health to determine if you have this bacterium. Left untreated, it can do permanent damage to your stomach and small intestine, and increase your risk for stomach and other cancers.

Once discovered, treatment is as important as incorporating the right supplements to rebuild the stomach lining and return it to normal function, which will increase the breakdown of food, increase absorption, and prevent reinfection.

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