

# Gastritis

## WHAT IS GASTRITIS?

Gastritis is a medical condition where the lining of the stomach becomes inflamed. Inflammation refers to a physical condition in which a part of the body becomes irritated, reddened, swollen and often painful. It may occur as a brief and sudden attack, as an ongoing condition, or as part of a medical illness. Treatment involves lifestyle changes and may involve medication.

## WHAT CAUSES GASTRITIS?

Gastritis can be caused by many factors including alcohol, medication, infection and some allergic or immune reactions. It can also be associated with an infection of the stomach lining by a specific bacterium called *Helicobacter pylori* (*H. pylori*). In some people it causes ulcers. An ulcer is a small hole in the lining of the stomach or part of the small intestine (duodenum).

Gastritis can be caused by a number of other factors including:

- some medications (such as aspirin and ibuprofen)
- infections
- alcohol
- smoking
- coffee (and other caffeine drinks)
- anxiety or stress.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Symptoms include:

- a burning pain in the upper abdomen or lower chest
- belching (burping)
- nausea (feeling like you are going to vomit)

- vomiting
- a loss of appetite
- hiccups
- weight loss.

The pain may be made better or worse with food. Some people have no obvious symptoms.

## TREATMENT

Your doctor may want to confirm that you have gastritis and exclude other causes. You may be referred to a gastroenterologist (a doctor who specialises in stomach problems) for further tests and treatment. You may be booked in for an outpatient appointment to have specialised tests such as the following:

- A gastroscopy – where a long thin tube with a tiny camera is passed down the oesophagus (food pipe) and into the stomach. A small tissue sample (biopsy) may be taken for further testing.
- A breath test – where you are given a special solution to swallow. If the *H. pylori* bacteria is present in the gut then gas by-products are released and detected in your breath. This test can also be arranged by your local doctor.

Changes in your diet may be a big part of your treatment plan. Discuss these with your local doctor, but in general people with gastritis should not drink alcohol and avoid spicy or 'hot' food.

There are several medications to treat gastritis:

- antacids (such as Mylanta or Gastrogel), which can neutralise the stomach acid but can cause constipation or diarrhoea and may reduce absorption of some medications (for more information, speak to your local doctor or pharmacist)

- medication to protect the stomach lining (for example, pantoprazole, Gaviscon)
- medication to reduce stomach acid (for example, pantoprazole, esomeprazole)
- antibiotics to treat the *H. pylori* bacterial infection, if present.

## HOME CARE

- Take your medications as directed. If antibiotics are prescribed, finish the full course of antibiotics, even if you feel better after a few days.
- Learn what brings on or 'triggers' your symptoms and avoid it.
- Avoid aspirin and anti-inflammatory medications such as ibuprofen because they can make the gastritis worse. Talk to your doctor or healthcare professional about what medications you can use.
- Avoid foods that upset your stomach such as spicy or fatty foods.
- Limit alcohol and coffee (and other products with caffeine in them).
- Quit smoking.

## WHAT TO EXPECT

Overall, gastritis responds well to simple treatment. Gastritis symptoms may flare up (worsen) from time to time. Sometimes the illness may become serious and result in severe pain or bleeding, which needs urgent medical attention.

## Seeking help

In a medical emergency call an ambulance – dial triple zero (000). Do this if you have severe pain or bleeding (such as vomiting blood or black sticky bowel actions).

If your symptoms persist or get worse, see your local doctor or healthcare professional.

For health advice from a registered nurse you can call NURSE-ON-CALL 24 hours a day on 1300 60 60 24 for the cost of a local call from anywhere in Victoria.\*

NURSE-ON-CALL provides access to interpreting services for callers not confident with English.

\* Calls from mobiles may be charged at a higher rate.

## WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- Ask your local doctor or healthcare professional.
- Visit the Better Health Channel at [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au).
- Contact Quit for help to stop smoking on 137 848 (Quitline) or [www.quit.org.au](http://www.quit.org.au)

To receive this publication in an accessible format phone 9096 7770, using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or email [emergencycare.clinicalnetwork@safercare.vic.gov.au](mailto:emergencycare.clinicalnetwork@safercare.vic.gov.au)

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