A Stomach Bug
Worse Than Food Poisoning?

Martie Whittekin, CCN

Food poisoning bacteria *E. coli* and *Salmonella* certainly inflict misery and, in weakened persons, can be deadly. Fortunately, after the nausea and diarrhea run their course, they are not heard from again unless we eat something contaminated.

*H. pylori* (*Helicobacter pylori*) also affects the stomach but is more deadly and long-lasting. It can lead to ulcers that claim 9,000 Americans yearly and stomach cancer that kills 11,000. *H. pylori* is not in the news despite being the world’s most common bacterial infection—it stays under the radar because it acts slowly.

You might suspect an *H. pylori* infection if you have one or more of these issues: heartburn, stinky breath (without a serious gum problem), bloating, stomach pain, or nausea or vomiting an hour or so after a meal. It also interferes with our stomach acid; so you should be concerned if you also have symptoms of stomach acid deficiency listed in my book. (Osteoporosis is one example.) *H. pylori* is also believed to be involved in migraine headaches, rosacea, one type of arthritis, anemia, B12 deficiency, glaucoma, heart disease, atrial fibrillation, asthma, and morning sickness.

In spite of all those potential clues, doctors do not usually test for *H. pylori* unless the patient has a raging ulcer. It is too typical in our medical system to just treat each symptom individually with a prescription drug. Third-party payers don’t reimburse physicians for the time needed to analyze history and test for an underlying cause, and waiting for the system to change probably isn’t a viable option. There is much we can do ourselves though, and prevention is always better than the most enlightened treatment.

*H. pylori* prevention raises two obvious questions: why don’t all people who are exposed become infected? And why do only one in six who harbor *H. pylori* come down with a diagnosable stomach disease? We know that *H. pylori* bacteria are transmitted through tainted food or water, so improved sanitation reduces exposure. However, its ability to infect and cause trouble depends largely on the condition of the potential host (that’s us).

For example, two-thirds of stomach cancer cases occur in people over age 65; That is when our bodies begin to exhibit the accumulated insults of smoking, alcohol excess, unsatisfactory diet, stress, toxic buildup, and medication usage. (Note that alcohol excess is an *H. pylori* risk, but moderate alcohol is actually protective—apparently it sterilizes the stomach.) Those who eat the most smoked and highly salted foods, but few fruits and vegetables, are also at higher risk to stomach cancer.

A key protector against *H. pylori* is sufficient stomach acid. Stomach acid is our first line of defense against invaders but typically declines after age 50. That’s coincidentally when the risk of *H. pylori* infection goes up. Acid-blocking drugs like Nexium and Prilosec purposely deplete stomach acid. Not surprisingly, folks who regularly take that type of drug are at much greater risk for dying of pneumonia! A second line of defense is our beneficial bacteria called probiotics. These good guys compete with the bad guys for space and food and they attack pathogens with natural anti-bacterial chemicals.

Individuals who have healthy gastrointestinal mucous membranes do not become infected with *H. pylori*, or at least do not develop symptoms. To maintain that important barrier we must not only eat food rich in tissue-repair nutrients, we must also be able to digest and absorb those nutrients. Aiding proper digestion is another key role of friendly bacteria.
In fact, probiotics benefit almost every function in the body directly or indirectly. Our very life depends on the several pounds of good bugs that should live in our gut. They create vitamins (A, B, B, B, B, B, B, B, K and Biotin); feed the gut lining; help digest food; detoxify dangerous substances; help remove hormone excess; help maintain healthy cholesterol and triglyceride levels; increase the number of immune cells; help cells reproduce normally; reduce inflammation and stimulate cell repair mechanisms. Knowing those fundamental functions, you can imagine the health trouble and potential for infection that ensues if the probiotics become weakened. There is one beneficial bacterial strain, TH10, which has been shown in the laboratory to be especially effective against H. pylori.

TH10 is only contained in the probiotic system, Dr. Ohhira's Probiotics 12 PLUS.

If you are suspicious that you may have an H. pylori infection, your doctor can use a diagnostic breath test. That type is more meaningful than a blood test, which doesn't indicate if the bug is still active. The standard medical treatment for H. pylori involves strong antibiotics. This is ironic, since the general overuse of antibiotics has allowed H. pylori to develop into more resistant strains.

The antibiotics also kill our probiotics—a side effect that can produce broad and lasting damage.

If a person is not in grave condition, it makes sense to me that he or she would first try the natural remedies listed below.

If antibiotics are necessary, the natural remedies can still be added for their own benefits.

At the very least, folks should protect themselves from the unwanted effects of the antibiotics by using probiotics. Probiotic supplements should be taken throughout the course of antibiotics (and after), but taken at a different time of day.

Other natural substances that help fight H. pylori are sulforaphane (found in cruciferous vegetables such as cauliflower, cabbage, kale, and broccoli), turmeric (the familiar yellow spice), mastic gum (a Mediterranean food ingredient from tree resin), ginger, cranberry, vitamin C, berberine (an herb constituent), DGL (a special form of licorice), and zinc carnosine (which also helps heal the GI membranes). Keep in mind the same items used as remedies can also be used for prevention.

More details about H. pylori diagnosis and current medical treatment options can be found on the Helicobacter Foundation website (www.helico.com).

Martie Whittekin is a certified clinical nutritionist and host of the nationally-syndicated radio talk show, Healthy by Nature. Learn more by reading her new book Natural Alternatives to Nexium, Maalox, Prilosec and other Acid Blockers. Or visit www.RadioMartie.com to view free health articles, including several about the importance of probiotics.
Copyright of Total Health is the property of Total Health Holdings LLC, and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.