

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. These specialised tests may include:

- 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 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 (check with your doctor if this medication is right for you)
- 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 (unless prescribed by your doctor for other conditions) 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

Cabrini Emergency Department (ED) is staffed by experienced emergency doctors and nurses 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. If you have any questions about your ED treatment our qualified ED staff can be contacted on **(03) 9508 1500** at any time. If you need to return to Cabrini ED for ongoing care we would be glad to take care of you again and if this occurs within a week of your initial consultation the doctor's fee will be bulk-billed.

You can also expect to receive a phone call or SMS message from one of our emergency nurses the day after you have been discharged. The nurse will be able to clarify any aspect of your diagnosis, treatment, or follow-up.

In a medical emergency return to Cabrini ED if it is safe to do so or go to the nearest hospital emergency department or call an ambulance – dial triple zero (000).

Return to Cabrini ED if:

- You have severe pain
- You have vomited blood
- You have had a black sticky bowel motion
- If your symptoms persist or are getting worse

Want to know more?

- Contact Cabrini ED on **(03) 9508 1500**
- Ask your local doctor or healthcare professional
- Visit the Better Health Channel at www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au
- Contact Quit for help to stop smoking on 137 848 or visit www.quit.org.au