

HELICOBACTER PYLORI

In 1979, J. Robin Warren, a pathologist at the Royal Perth Hospital in Australia, discovered the presence of a new bacterium in the stomach of people suffering from abdominal ulcers. Subsequently it has been shown that this microorganism infects approximately 50% of all people over the age of 60 years in the developed world. Helicobacter pylori is believed to be the only bacterium able to withstand the acidity of the stomach. High levels of stress, caffeine, alcohol, non-steroidal anti-inflammatories such as aspirin can increase the incidence of this infection.

This bacterium has been shown to be the single biggest cause of gastric and duodenal ulcers and gastritis. It is now believed that virtually all abdominal ulcers, apart from drug-induced forms, are caused by a Helicobacter pylori infection.

This test is suitable for anyone with a history of one or more the following symptoms

Symptoms of a dull, gnawing ache that persists for days or even weeks, that occurs 2 – 3 hours after eating or in the middle of the night, and is relieved by eating or taking antacids, and/or any of the symptoms listed below:

- Duodenal and gastric ulcers
- Chronic gastritis
- Excess acidity or dyspepsia
- Coronary heart disease
- Indigestion
- Heartburn
- Acid reflux
- Nausea and vomiting
- Weight loss and decreased appetite
- Upper intestinal bloating
- Burping

The Risk

H. pylori infection is strongly associated with persistent stomach inflammation (chronic superficial gastritis), and studies have shown that such inflammation significantly increases the risk of stomach or duodenal ulcer formation.

When H. pylori is eradicated, ulcers heal and don't reoccur. The treatment now used is a combination of antibiotics, bismuth and h2 blockers. It would be wise to consider testing all immediate family members if one member does have H. pylori.

How does the test work?

The breath test procedure is a highly accurate and non-invasive diagnostic tool utilising a C13 urea powder to detect the presence or absence of an active H. pylori infection in the human stomach. The patient must provide two sets of breath samples, with an interval of an hour, following a 4-hour fast.

Nationwide Test Kit Service

Most of the tests involve simple kits that can be used in your own home. Some may require the help of a nurse or GP. If you cannot visit the laboratory you can phone and arrange for your kit to be sent in the post. Once samples have been taken, you simply post the test kit back to the laboratory. We would encourage you to use guaranteed delivery and not to send kits over the weekend.

