

Helicobacter pylori (H. pylori)

What is Helicobacter pylori?

Helicobacter pylori (H. pylori) is a spiral-shaped bacterium that infects the lining of your stomach. It is one of the most common bacterial infections worldwide and can survive in the stomach's acidic environment by producing an enzyme called urease, which helps neutralise stomach acid. While many people with H. pylori do not experience symptoms, the bacteria can sometimes lead to digestive problems, including inflammation (gastritis), stomach ulcers, and, in rare cases, stomach cancer.

How do you get H. pylori?

H. pylori is typically spread through contaminated food, water, or utensils. It can also be passed from person to person through saliva or contact with vomit or faeces. Poor hygiene and overcrowded living conditions can increase the risk of infection.

What are the symptoms of H. pylori?

Many people with H. pylori do not experience symptoms. However, when symptoms do occur, they may include:

- A burning or gnawing pain in the stomach, especially when your stomach is empty
- Bloating or a feeling of fullness after eating
- Nausea or vomiting
- Loss of appetite
- Unexplained weight loss
- Dark or black stools (a sign of bleeding in the stomach)

If you experience any of these symptoms, especially unexplained weight loss, blood in your vomit or stools, or severe abdominal pain, it's important to seek medical advice.

How is H. pylori diagnosed?

At Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic, we use reliable tests to diagnose H. pylori, including:

- **Breath test:** You will drink a harmless solution and breathe into a bag. This measures the presence of urease, an enzyme produced by H. pylori

- **Stool test:** A sample of your stool is tested for H. pylori antigens
- **Upper GI endoscopy with biopsy:** During an endoscopy, a small sample of tissue is taken from your stomach lining and tested for H. pylori. This method is particularly useful if you have more serious symptoms or complications such as ulcers

Your doctor will recommend the most suitable test based on your symptoms and medical history.

How is H. pylori treated?

If H. pylori is detected, your doctor will usually recommend a treatment called **triple therapy**, which involves:

- **Two antibiotics** to kill the bacteria
- **A proton pump inhibitor (PPI)** to reduce stomach acid and help the stomach lining heal

In some cases, a bismuth-containing medication may also be added to the treatment plan. The course typically lasts 7-14 days, and it's important to take all the medication as prescribed to ensure the infection is fully eradicated.

What happens after treatment?

After completing treatment, your doctor may recommend a follow-up test to confirm that the infection has been successfully cleared. This is particularly important if you had a stomach ulcer or if symptoms persist. The follow-up test is usually a breath or stool test, done at least four weeks after completing treatment.

How can you reduce the risk of H. pylori?

You can reduce the risk of H. pylori infection by:

- Washing your hands thoroughly with soap and water, especially before eating and after using the toilet
- Eating food that has been properly cooked
- Drinking clean, safe water
- Avoiding sharing utensils, drinks, or food with others

These simple hygiene practices can help prevent H. pylori from spreading.

Why is treating H. pylori important?

Left untreated, H. pylori can cause long-term complications, including:

- Stomach ulcers, which can lead to bleeding or perforation
- Chronic gastritis, causing ongoing inflammation in the stomach
- An increased risk of stomach cancer in some cases

By diagnosing and treating H. pylori early, you can prevent these complications and improve your digestive health.

Why choose Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic?

At Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic, we offer expert care for the diagnosis and treatment of H. pylori infections. Our team of experienced specialists uses advanced diagnostic tools, including endoscopy, to ensure accurate results and effective treatment plans. We are committed to providing personalised, patient-centred care to help you feel better and protect your long-term health.

Contact us

If you are experiencing symptoms of H. pylori or have concerns about your digestive health, contact Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic today to book your consultation. Early diagnosis and treatment can make a big difference in improving your symptoms and preventing complications.