

Peptic ulcer disease

What is peptic ulcer disease?

Peptic ulcer disease refers to sores or ulcers that develop on the lining of your stomach or the upper part of your small intestine (duodenum). These ulcers occur when the protective layer of your stomach lining is damaged, allowing stomach acid to create an open sore. At Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic, we are here to help diagnose and treat peptic ulcers effectively, relieving your symptoms and improving your digestive health.

What causes peptic ulcers?

Peptic ulcers develop when the balance between stomach acid and the protective lining of your stomach or small intestine is disrupted. The most common causes include:

- **Helicobacter pylori (H. pylori) infection:** A bacterial infection that weakens the protective lining of your stomach, making it more vulnerable to acid damage
- **Long-term use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs):** Such as ibuprofen or aspirin, which can irritate the stomach lining
- **Excess stomach acid production:** Triggered by stress, spicy foods, or certain medical conditions, though this is less common

Lifestyle factors such as smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, and high levels of stress can also increase your risk of developing peptic ulcers.

What are the symptoms of peptic ulcer disease?

The symptoms of a peptic ulcer can vary but often include:

- A burning or gnawing pain in your stomach or abdomen, which may worsen when your stomach is empty or at night
- Indigestion or bloating after eating
- Feeling full quickly or a loss of appetite
- Nausea or vomiting
- Heartburn or acid reflux

In some cases, peptic ulcers can lead to more serious symptoms, such as:

- Vomiting blood, which may appear bright red or look like coffee grounds
- Dark, tar-like stools (a sign of bleeding in your digestive system)
- Sudden, severe abdominal pain

If you experience any of these symptoms, especially the more severe ones, it's important to seek medical attention promptly.

How is peptic ulcer disease diagnosed?

At Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic, we use advanced diagnostic tools to confirm the presence of a peptic ulcer and determine its cause. These tests may include:

- **Upper GI endoscopy:** A thin, flexible tube with a camera is passed into your stomach to look for ulcers and take tissue samples if necessary
- **H. pylori testing:** A breath, blood, stool, or biopsy test can detect the presence of H. pylori bacteria
- **Barium swallow X-ray:** In rare cases, you may be asked to drink a barium solution before an X-ray, which highlights ulcers in your stomach or small intestine

How is peptic ulcer disease treated?

Treatment for peptic ulcers focuses on relieving symptoms, healing the ulcer, and preventing complications. Depending on the cause, your treatment may include:

- **Antibiotics:** If an H. pylori infection is present, a combination of antibiotics is used to eradicate the bacteria
- **Proton pump inhibitors (PPIs):** These medications reduce stomach acid production, allowing the ulcer to heal
- **Antacids:** Over-the-counter antacids may be used for temporary symptom relief
- **Stopping NSAIDs:** If NSAIDs are contributing to your ulcer, your doctor may recommend an alternative pain reliever

In rare cases where complications occur, surgery may be required to repair the ulcer or treat any bleeding.

How can you prevent peptic ulcers?

You can reduce your risk of developing peptic ulcers by:

- **Avoiding NSAIDs:** Only take these medications when necessary and as directed by your doctor
- **Treating H. pylori infections:** If diagnosed, follow your treatment plan to eliminate the bacteria
- **Reducing alcohol and smoking:** Both can irritate the stomach lining and delay healing
- **Eating a balanced diet:** Focus on foods that are less likely to irritate your stomach
- **Managing stress:** Stress may contribute to symptoms, so relaxation techniques and exercise can help

Why choose Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic?

At Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic, we specialise in diagnosing and managing conditions like peptic ulcer disease with state-of-the-art technology and a patient-centred approach. Our experienced team will work closely with you to create a personalised treatment plan, helping you find relief from your symptoms and protect your digestive health.

Contact us

If you're experiencing symptoms of peptic ulcer disease or have concerns about your digestive health, contact Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic today to book your consultation. Early diagnosis and treatment can make a significant difference in your recovery and overall well-being.