

# ST. NICHOLAS HOSPITAL HEALTHSOURCE

## Stomach Ulcers Need Treatment

If you experience frequent, gnawing or burning pain in your stomach, there is a chance you are suffering from an ulcer, a raw area or open sore in the lining of the stomach. The pain you feel is caused by stomach acid.

Normally, your stomach is protected from stomach acids by a layer of mucus-producing cells. If this layer of cells is damaged, an ulcer can develop.

Stomach ulcers are common. While most are caused by bacteria, you may also develop an ulcer if the lining of your stomach is not able to protect itself from acids or your stomach makes too much acid. You are more likely to get an ulcer if you take aspirin, ibuprofen, or naproxen often; drink alcohol; smoke tobacco; or often feel stressed.

To diagnose an ulcer, your doctor usually orders one or more of these tests:

- An x-ray taken after you swallow barium, which lets your doctor see the ulcer on the x-ray
- Blood tests to look for ulcer-causing bacteria and/or detect anemia
- An endoscopy, in which a thin flexible tube and tiny camera are inserted through your mouth into your stomach to allow your physician see the ulcer
- A biopsy of tissue from your stomach

While stomach ulcers improve with treatment, they can recur. Therefore, be sure to follow your physician's advice to lower the chance that the ulcer will return.

If you have had an ulcer, you should take some precautions. Avoid tobacco, alcohol, aspirin, ibuprofen, and naproxen. Minimize caffeine intake. Eat frequent small, healthy meals instead of large meals and learn how to reduce stress.



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