

ULCERS ARE NO LAUGHING MATTER

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Peptic ulcers, which are in the stomach and the duodenum (the first part of the intestine leading from the stomach) can occur at any age and affect both men and women. Untreated, sufferers can look forward to a long siege with them. But today's peptic ulcer sufferers have a brighter prospect for relief than did those of even a single generation ago. There is now less than 1 chance in 18 that surgery will every be necessary and new medications act faster and better and offer more relief than ever before.

The warning sign of active ulcers you will most likely experience (if you get any warning at all) is a gnawing discomfort in the middle or upper abdomen that typically comes between meals or in the middle of the night. Food or liquids, including antacids and milk, can provide some temporary relief, but milk might not be all that good a remedy since it stimulates production of hydrochloric acid and other digestive juices which further aggravates the pain.

Antacids blended from aluminum, calcium or magnesium salts, have long been the non prescription drugs most people quickly reach for to get relief from their stomach pains. But, because antacids interfere with absorption of some medications, be sure to go over this with your doctor and get his approval.

You should never ignore any warning signs of ulcers. Ulcer complications are serious and in some cases can be life-threatening. If pain from ulcers persists after more than 10 to 14 days of self-treatment or comes back when treatment ends, you should see your doctor. The passing of blood through the bowels may be caused by some other problem, but it can also be an urgent warning of a bleeding ulcer.

Bleeding ulcers can cause anemia or, if the ulcer gets larger it may expand into a major blood vessel, a leak can turn into a hemorrhage, with only minutes available for life saving emergency treatment. Ulcers can also perforate and may erode completely through the wall of the stomach or duodenum. If this happens and the stomach's contents flow into the abdominal cavity, severe infection can result. A perforated ulcer is an emergency that requires immediate surgery.

It has been determined that smoking doubles a person's risk for ulcer disease. Physicians and researchers have found that ulcers heal a lot slower for smokers, and smokers also have a higher relapse rate.

And you're definitely at risk for ulcers if you take aspirin and any of the other products containing aspirin. High-dose Aspirin, Ibuprofen, Maproxen and Piroxicam are in wide use today for many conditions, especially to relieve pain and swelling among the millions of people who have arthritis. These medications can irritate the stomach's lining and cause gastrointestinal bleeding.

Ulcers have frequently been the target for humor in describing the stereotypical aggressive, pressured, goal-or-career-oriented person. But for those who have them, ulcers are certainly no laughing matter. Peptic ulcers strike 1 out of every 50 Americans each year.

As research continues, there is now mounting evidence that something other than smoking, drinking, spicy meals, or a possible battle with the boss may be associated with ulcers. It is now believed that ulcers are the result of a combination of conditions, the dynamics of which researchers don't yet fully understand.