

CHRONIC GASTRITIS

Chronic gastritis is an *inflammation* (swelling, irritation, redness, or warmth) of the stomach lining that occurs gradually over time. There are many possible causes including bacterial infection (especially *Helicobacter pylori*); irritation from aspirin, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications, cigarette smoke, alcohol, and other drugs or environmental substances; reflux of bile or pancreatic secretions into the stomach from the upper portion of the small intestine (*duodenum*). The latter occurs most frequently following surgery or with peptic ulcer disease. It may also occur with certain disease states including pernicious anemia and diabetes. Chronic gastritis is seen most often in the elderly but may occur at any age.

Symptoms *may* include:

Often there are no symptoms associated with chronic gastritis:

- Burning or gnawing sensation in the upper part of the stomach, stomach cramps or indigestion that may worsen especially after eating
- Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea
- Burping and acid taste in the mouth
- Black stools due to bleeding
- Decreased appetite

What *your doctor* can do:

- Diagnose chronic gastritis by asking about your symptoms, doing a physical exam, and ordering laboratory blood tests, x-rays and *gastroscopy* (using a long, thin, flexible tube with a light and optics to view and take tissue samples of the stomach lining)
- Order a laboratory antibody test to check for *Helicobacter pylori* (*H. pylori*)
- Order X-rays in which you are asked to drink a substance that makes it easier to see the digestive system (*barium swallow*)
- Further tests may be ordered if the underlying problem is not identified

Treatment will depend on the underlying cause and the severity of symptoms:

- Antibiotics to treat bacterial infections (H. pylori)
- Antacids to neutralize gastric acids
- Vitamin B-12 injections to correct pernicious anemia
- Surgery if symptoms are severe and dietary changes

What *you* can do:

- Avoid aspirin and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications (e.g. ibuprofen, naprosyn). Your doctor may identify and discontinue any other medications that may cause irritation.
- Limit alcoholic beverages, caffeine (coffee, some teas, colas) and spicy foods.
- Stop smoking. Ask your doctor if you need help.
- Eat small frequent meals to help reduce symptoms

What *you* can expect:

- Treatment combined with good self-care and lifestyle changes is generally effective.
- Possible complications include bleeding (severe) and an increased risk of gastric cancer.

Contact your doctor if symptoms do not improve with treatment, symptoms worsen, or recur.

Seek immediate medical assistance if you start vomiting blood or material that looks like coffee grounds, if your stools are black, tarry, foul-smelling or contain blood!