

## Gastrointestinal Conditions and Medications

Gastrointestinal (GI) conditions can reduce your quality of life and sometimes cause serious illness if they are not treated promptly and appropriately.

### What Are Common GI Conditions?<sup>1-3</sup>

- **Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD):** GERD occurs when the contents of the stomach rise up into the esophagus (the tube that carries food from the mouth to the stomach). This is also called acid reflux. The main symptom of GERD in adults is frequent heartburn. Some adults have GERD without heartburn and may instead experience dry cough, asthma symptoms, or trouble swallowing.
- **Ulcer:** A peptic ulcer is a sore on the lining of the stomach (gastric ulcer) or duodenum (duodenal ulcer). The duodenum is the beginning of the small intestine, which is attached to the stomach and receives contents of the stomach after digestion.
  - Peptic ulcers are common and can be treated successfully by first seeing your health care provider. The most common symptom of peptic ulcers is a burning pain in the gut. Other related symptoms include weight loss, poor appetite, bloating, nausea, and vomiting.
  - One cause of peptic ulcer is bacterial infection due to *H. pylori*, but some ulcers are caused by long-term use of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as aspirin and ibuprofen, which can weaken the protective lining of the stomach.
  - Peptic ulcers are not caused by stress or eating spicy food, but they can worsen an ulcer.

### What Can I Do To Better Manage My GI Conditions?

#### If you have GERD:<sup>1</sup>

- Eat small, frequent meals.
- If you smoke, stop smoking.
- Lose weight if needed.
- Wear loose-fitting clothes.
- Avoid foods and beverages that can worsen symptoms (eg, acidic foods, fatty and fried foods, spicy foods, garlic and onions, mint flavorings, chocolate, and drinks with caffeine or alcohol).
- Avoid lying down for three hours after a meal.
- Raise the head of your bed six to eight inches by putting blocks of wood under the bedposts. Just using extra pillows may not help.
- Medications such as antacids, foaming agents (eg, Gaviscon<sup>®</sup>), H2 blockers, and proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) can also be used to treat GERD.



### If you have an ulcer:<sup>2-4</sup>

- If you smoke, stop smoking.
- Avoid alcohol and spicy foods that can worsen your symptoms.
- Take your medications as prescribed by your health care provider.
- Ulcers caused by NSAIDs usually heal once you stop taking the NSAIDs. To help the healing process and relieve symptoms, your health care provider may recommend taking antacids to neutralize the acid and medications such as H2-blockers or PPIs to decrease the amount of acid the stomach produces.
- Ulcers caused by *H. pylori* are also treated with antibiotics that kill the bacteria in addition to medications such as H2 blockers and PPIs that decrease stomach acid and protect the stomach. Treatment usually lasts 10 to 14 days, and once treated, reoccurrence is rare.

### How Will I Know If The Medications Are Working?<sup>1, 2</sup>

- GERD symptoms typically begin to improve soon after you begin taking medications. See your health care provider if you continue to have symptoms of GERD after using over-the-counter (OTC) reflux medications for more than two weeks. Your health care provider may instruct you to continue taking medications—such as PPIs—on a regular basis to keep your GERD symptoms from coming back.
- If you are taking medications for an ulcer, it may take several days to relieve the ulcer pain. For quicker pain relief, antacids may be taken unless your health care provider has told you not to use them.

### What Are The Benefits Of Taking The Medication?<sup>1, 2</sup>

- If you have GERD, taking a medication can reduce symptoms and help prevent very serious complications such as bleeding of the esophagus.
- Medications such as antibiotics, H2 blockers, and PPIs that are used to treat ulcers can relieve pain and heal the ulcers. They can also help prevent serious bleeding complications.

**Table 1. Summary of Medications for the Treatment of GI Conditions<sup>5,6</sup>**

Proton Pump Inhibitors (PPIs)		H2 Blockers		Antibiotic Combinations	
Brand Name	Active Ingredient	Brand Name	Active Ingredient	Brand Name	Active Ingredient
Aciphex®	rabeprazole	Axid®	nizatidine	Helidac®	bismuth subsalicylate/ metronidazole/ tetracycline
Kapindex®	dexlansoprazole	Pepcid®	famotidine		
Nexium®	esomeprazole	Tagament®	cimetidine	PrevPac®	lansoprazole/ clarithromycin/ amoxicillin
Prevacid®	lansoprazole	Zantac®	ranitidine		
Prilosec®	omeprazole			Pylera®	bismuth subcitrate potassium/ metronidazole/ tetracycline
Protonix®	pantoprazole				

## How Do These Medications Work?

- H2 blockers and PPIs decrease the amount of acid the stomach produces.
- Antibiotics are used to treat peptic ulcers caused by *H. pylori* bacteria.

### What are some common side effects?

- Incidence is low but common side effects of H2 blockers and PPIs include diarrhea and headache.
- Metronidazole (which is one of the ingredients in Helidac and Pylera) may cause headaches.
- Treatment with H2 blockers, PPIs, and antibiotic combinations do not usually cause drowsiness or sexual dysfunction.
- Be sure to consult with your health care provider if you experience any troublesome or persistent side effects.

### Consult with your health care provider or pharmacist if you take any of the following:

- Medications that need an acidic environment to be absorbed may be affected by PPIs. Examples include ampicillin, digoxin, iron salts, and ketoconazole. Please check with your health care provider or pharmacist to see if any of your medications interact with PPIs in this way.
- Cimetidine can cause the concentration of many different medications to increase in your blood. Please check with your health care provider or pharmacist to see if any of your medications interact with cimetidine in this way.

*Note: This is not a complete list of possible drug interactions.*

### Special Instructions:

- Take Nexium, Prevacid, or Prilosec before meals.
- Take your prescribed medication(s) for the full length of treatment, even if you begin to feel better.
- Do NOT drink alcohol while taking metronidazole (which is one of the ingredients in Helidac and Pylera) and for one to three days after your last dose of metronidazole.
- The absorption of tetracycline (which is one of the ingredients in Helidac and Pylera) can decrease if you take it with antacids containing aluminum, calcium, or magnesium, and preparations containing iron, zinc, or sodium bicarbonate. Please check with your health care provider or pharmacist to see if you are taking anything that can decrease the level of tetracycline in your blood.
- Keep your check-up appointments with your health care provider so s/he will be better able to tell you when to stop taking the medication. It is important to do so even if you start to feel better as a result of these medications, since long-term use may mask symptoms of more serious GI problems.

## What If I Miss A Dose?

- If you miss a dose of your H2 blocker, PPI, Helidac, Prevpac, or Pylera, take it as soon as possible. However, if it is almost time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and go back to your regular dosing schedule. Do not double doses. If you miss more than four doses of Helidac or Pylera, please contact your health care provider.
- Check with your health care provider or pharmacist if you are not sure of what to do when you miss a dose.

## How Can I Reduce My Medication Costs?

- **Ask for a generic medication if possible.** Generic medications must be approved by the FDA and are held to the same high standards of quality as brand name medications, but may cost up to 50 percent to 80 percent less. Talk to your health care provider to see if you can switch to an available generic medication.

## Where Can I Get More Information?

Talk to your health care provider or pharmacist if you have questions about your medications. Be sure to give them a list of all prescription and OTC medications that you are currently taking, including herbal supplements and vitamins. You can also learn more about GI conditions at the National Digestive Disease Information Clearinghouse (NDDIC) Web site, <http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov>.

### References:

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