

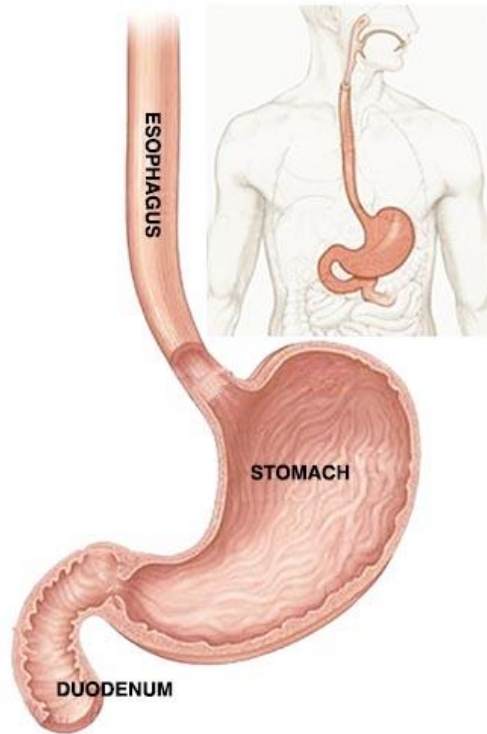


## Gastritis

First, some medical terminology.

1. The word gastric refers to the stomach organ, which lies between the bottom of the esophagus and the first part of the small intestine, called the duodenum.
2. The suffix “-itis” refers to inflammation, like tonsillitis, appendicitis, colitis, etc.

Gastritis is a condition characterized by inflammation of the stomach lining, leading to discomfort and potential complications if untreated. As part of the digestive system, the stomach plays a vital role in breaking down food, and its inner lining serves as a protective shield against the stomach’s powerful acids.



### It's About The Acid: HCl



Perhaps you recall that when dealing with powerful hydrochloric acid (HCl) in high school chemistry class, you had to wear goggles, gloves, and an apron to protect yourself from this powerful acid. Unbelievably, this is the same acid produced inside your stomach that helps digest your food. For example, when you eat a piece of meat, the HCl in your stomach liquefies that meat, aiding the digestive process. Your stomach is made out of meat. Why don't you digest your stomach? The stomach has a protective acid-resistant mucous lining. This barrier typically prevents these acids from causing damage. *However, when the lining is weakened or compromised, these acids can penetrate and irritate the stomach wall, leading to inflammation, commonly called gastritis.*

## What is Gastritis?

Gastritis, put simply, is inflammation of the stomach lining. The condition, known as acute gastritis, can arise suddenly or develop gradually, termed chronic gastritis. These types often produce varying degrees of discomfort, yet they share a common characteristic: stomach lining irritation. Acute gastritis typically presents with sudden and sharp abdominal pain, along with nausea and vomiting. On the other hand, chronic gastritis develops over a more extended period, often resulting in milder yet persistent symptoms. People with chronic gastritis may experience bloating, dull stomach aches, or a sensation of fullness even after eating only a small amount.

## Causes of Gastritis

Various factors can cause gastritis, from infections to lifestyle habits. One of the most common culprits behind chronic gastritis is a bacterium called Helicobacter pylori, or H. pylori. This bacterium resides in the stomach lining and is known to cause long-term inflammation. Left untreated, an H. pylori infection can lead to more severe conditions, such as ulcers and even an increased risk of stomach cancer.

Another common cause of gastritis is the frequent use of certain pain relievers, specifically nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) like ibuprofen and aspirin. While these medications effectively reduce pain, they can wear down the stomach lining over time, leaving it vulnerable to irritation and inflammation from stomach acids.

Excessive alcohol consumption is another significant factor contributing to gastritis. Alcohol can weaken the stomach lining, making it more susceptible to acid damage. Chronic alcohol consumption is mainly associated with acute forms of gastritis, where symptoms appear more suddenly and can be quite severe. In addition to these factors, there is a form of gastritis known as autoimmune gastritis, where the body's immune system mistakenly targets the cells of the stomach lining. This condition is often seen in individuals with other autoimmune disorders, such as Hashimoto's thyroiditis or type 1 diabetes, as these immune responses may inadvertently cause inflammation in the stomach lining.

Stress, particularly physical stress from injuries, surgeries, or infections, can also trigger temporary bouts of gastritis. Known as stress-induced gastritis, this form usually subsides as the body recovers, yet it can be uncomfortable while present. Other causes of gastritis include bile reflux, severe trauma, and certain chronic conditions, such as Crohn's disease. Additionally, some medical treatments, such as chemotherapy, may increase the risk of developing gastritis by disrupting the stomach's protective functions.

## Common Symptoms of Gastritis

Gastritis symptoms can vary widely based on the cause and type of gastritis. Some individuals experience noticeable symptoms, while others may not feel any discomfort. *The most commonly reported symptom of gastritis is abdominal pain, which is generally located in the upper abdomen.* This pain may present as a gnawing or burning sensation, fluctuating depending on diet or stress levels. In some cases, individuals with gastritis find that their stomach pain becomes worse after eating, while others experience relief with food intake.

Nausea and vomiting are also frequently associated with gastritis, and in severe cases, these symptoms may involve the presence of blood in the vomit. Blood in vomit is a sign of a more severe form of gastritis and should prompt immediate medical attention. Chronic gastritis often leads to a sensation of bloating and fullness after eating only a small amount, impacting one's quality of life by disrupting normal eating patterns. Additionally, indigestion, also known as dyspepsia, can be a frequent complaint among those with gastritis. This encompasses general stomach discomfort, such as excessive burping, heartburn, and a sensation of indigestion. The presence of blood, either in vomit or stool, is particularly alarming and can indicate severe complications like ulcers or bleeding in the stomach lining. Black or tarry stools are another warning sign of internal bleeding and should be promptly evaluated by a healthcare provider.



## Diagnosing Gastritis

To accurately diagnose gastritis, healthcare providers employ several tests designed to pinpoint the cause and severity of the inflammation. One of the most definitive diagnostic tools for gastritis is endoscopy, a procedure where a thin, flexible tube with a camera is inserted into the stomach. This allows the physician to visualize the stomach lining directly, assessing for signs of inflammation, ulcers, or erosions. Often, during an endoscopy, a small tissue sample, or biopsy, is taken to examine the cells closely and confirm the presence of gastritis.

Testing for H. pylori is also essential in diagnosing gastritis, as this bacterium is a common cause of chronic inflammation in the stomach. H. pylori tests can include breath or stool tests, each designed to detect the presence of this bacterium and determine whether it may contribute to the gastritis symptoms. Tiny biopsies taken from the stomach lining during endoscopy can also be examined for signs of bacterial infection. (Blood tests for H. pylori cannot be trusted to signify an active infection, as they remain positive long after the disease is cured.)

Imaging tests such as X-rays or an upper gastrointestinal (GI) X-ray series do not show inflammation of gastritis. However, they may sometimes be recommended as they are beneficial for identifying ulcers or erosions that may not be visible through endoscopy alone.

### **Treatment and Management of Gastritis**

Treating gastritis focuses on relieving symptoms and addressing the underlying cause to reduce inflammation and promote healing of the stomach lining. *When H. pylori is identified as the cause, antibiotics are typically prescribed to eradicate the bacteria.* This form of targeted treatment addresses the root cause, helping to prevent future inflammation.

Acid-reducing medications play a critical role in symptom relief. These include antacids and proton pump inhibitors (PPIs like Prilosec, Protonix, or Nexium), which help lower stomach acid levels, relieve irritation, and allow the stomach lining to heal. H2 blockers, another type of acid-reducing medication, are often used in cases of chronic gastritis to maintain reduced acid levels over a longer period.

Carafate (sucralfate) is another prescription medication that helps heal gastritis. This medication does not reduce acid production like the PPIs but instead forms a thin film that coats and protects the stomach lining from acid exposure. It is best taken about 30 minutes before a meal. The patient must not eat or drink anything for 30 minutes after each dose while the medication activates. If you take Carafate with food, it coats the food instead of the stomach lining. It is usually taken 3 to 4 times a day for several weeks.

In addition to medications, lifestyle changes are essential for managing and preventing gastritis symptoms. Diet modifications can make a significant difference, especially for individuals with chronic gastritis. Avoiding foods and beverages that irritate the stomach, such as alcohol, spicy foods, and acidic items like citrus fruits and tomatoes, helps reduce gastritis symptoms. Stress management is another essential aspect of gastritis care, as stress can exacerbate inflammation in the stomach lining. Techniques like meditation, yoga, deep breathing, and other relaxation practices have been shown to help reduce stress levels, which may lessen the intensity and frequency of gastritis symptoms. Limiting or avoiding the use of NSAIDs is also advisable, especially for those who rely on these medications for pain management. Consulting a healthcare provider for alternative options can help reduce the risk of gastritis and protect the stomach lining.

### **Preventing Gastritis**

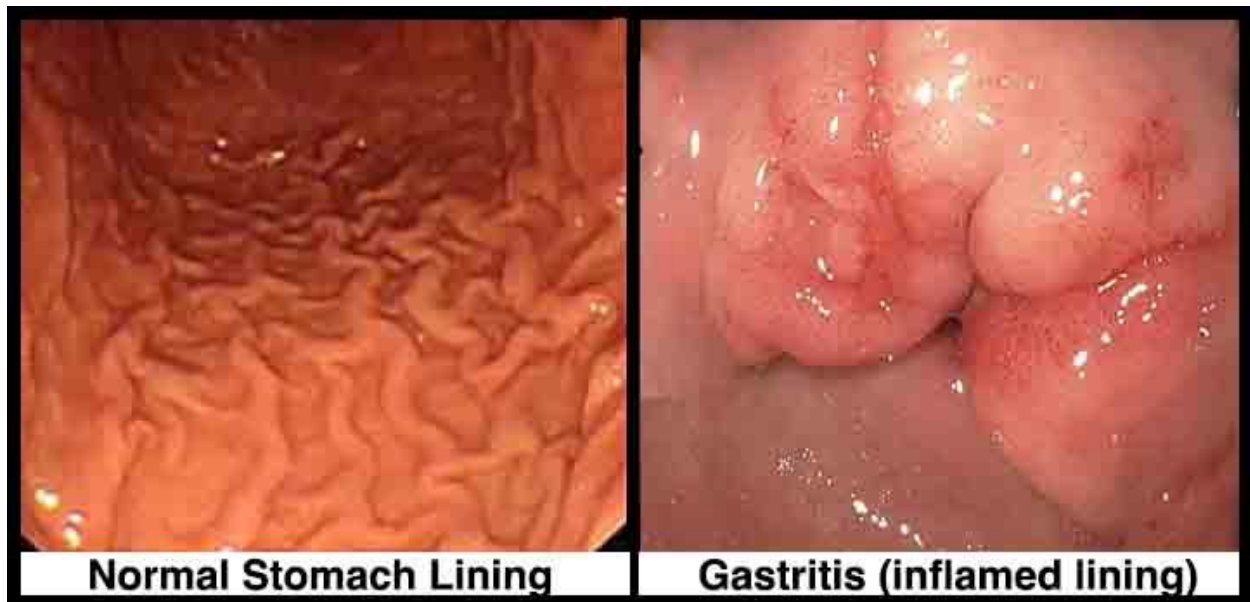
Preventing gastritis essentially involves making conscious lifestyle choices and managing known risk factors. For individuals who consume alcohol, moderating intake is essential, as this can help to prevent irritation in the stomach lining. Similarly, the long-term use of NSAIDs should be limited where possible, and a healthcare provider can offer alternative treatments for pain relief that are gentler on the stomach. Since stress directly impacts gastritis, incorporating relaxation techniques into daily routines can be a preventive measure, reducing the likelihood of stress-induced gastritis.

### **Complications of Untreated Gastritis**

Without timely treatment, gastritis can lead to serious complications. Chronic inflammation may gradually erode the stomach lining, resulting in painful ulcers that can bleed, causing additional health risks. A persistent *H. pylori* infection, if left untreated, is linked to a higher risk of developing stomach cancer, making early diagnosis and treatment crucial. Chronic gastritis can also cause anemia, as internal bleeding may lead to iron deficiency. Another potential complication is gastric outlet obstruction, where scar tissue from ulcers blocks the passage of food from the stomach to the small intestine, causing vomiting and other digestive symptoms.

### **Conclusion**

Gastritis is a common condition affecting many people globally. While it can lead to considerable discomfort, most cases can be managed effectively through lifestyle changes, medications, and proper medical care. Recognizing symptoms early and seeking appropriate medical help can prevent complications and enhance overall quality of life. If you suspect that you have gastritis, consult a healthcare provider for an accurate diagnosis and a personalized treatment plan.



## Non-Prescription NSAIDs

Frequent use of these common OTC Non-Steroidal Anti-inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs) are a common causes of gastritis especially when combined with a daily dose of aspirin (even low dose 81 mg )

