

Live Healthy and Be Well!

“Gastritis Primer”

We wish all our readers a happy and blessed new year and appreciate your feedback about these articles – and thank you Tracy and the *Georgia Mountain Laurel*!

One of our patients recently asked about the topic of “gastritis,” as she has had problems with that off and on. As you know, the term “-itis” attached to the end of any word indicates inflammation. In medicine, “Gastro-” usually refers to the stomach, so gastritis is a condition that describes inflammation of the stomach lining, which can either be acute (sudden) or chronic (long term). There is another kind of gastritis called “erosive” gastritis, which represents a special category for discussion as it may not have as many noticeable symptoms, but can be more trouble in the long run.

The stomach is lined with special cells which produce acids, to help with food digestion, and mucus, to protect the lining from the acid. These exist in a delicate balance. When the stomach lining becomes inflamed, it upsets this balance. Common symptoms of gastritis are upper abdominal discomfort or pain, nausea, and sometimes vomiting. The combination of these symptoms may also be termed “dyspepsia.” Acute gastritis may come and go quickly, and may have many causes – an increase in stress can cause many people to have stomach problems and indigestion, or if you eat some irritating food. These symptoms usually resolve as the stress decreases, and after any insult resolves. If the symptoms are persistent and go on for a long time, this may represent a more chronic form of gastritis.

The most common cause of chronic gastritis in our country is actually a bacterial infection. *Helicobacter Pylori* (also called *H. pylori*) is a spiral shaped bacterium that can take up residence in the lining of the stomach, usually near the distal part (pylorus) and results in chronic gastritis. The presence of this infection may also make it easier for one to develop stomach ulcers. This bacterium is most commonly transmitted from person to person, and also through contaminated food and water. It is much more prevalent in third world countries, but may infect up to 50% of the population of the United States. There are various methods used to diagnose *H. pylori* infection to include blood test, breath test, or testing a stool sample. The most reliable technique, however, involves getting an actual biopsy of the stomach lining during an upper endoscopy exam called an EGD (EsophagoGastroDuodenoscopy). If you are found to have *H. pylori* in your stomach lining, it can be treated with a two week course of medicines, allowing the gastritis to resolve.

The third type of gastritis is the erosive type, which can lead to bleeding, erosions, or ulcers. Although it can be more destructive, it often does not have significant symptoms until a serious problem occurs. Erosive gastritis is most commonly caused by overuse of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as aspirin, ibuprofen, Goody or BC Powders, and Tylenol. It can also be brought about by alcohol abuse, use of cocaine and other illicit drugs, and tobacco smoking – these risk factors all predispose a person to erosive gastritis.

The treatment of almost all forms of gastritis is to remove the insult to the stomach lining, and then reduce the amount of acid to allow the mucosa to heal. Common home remedies such as baking soda, Tums, and Roloids work by neutralizing the acid. Your healthcare provider may prescribe some stronger medicines such as acid blockers (Zantac, Pepcid) and proton pump inhibitors such as Prilosec and Prevacid. If *H. pylori* is the cause of the gastritis, it must be diagnosed and treated with antibiotics in order to ensure complete recovery.

We really do enjoy hearing from you with any questions, concerns, or ideas for future columns and/or health and wellness related issues for the *Georgia Mountain Laurel*. Please send an email to rabundoctor@gmail.com, or call us at 706-782-3572, and we will be sure to consider your input. This and previous articles can be now be found on the web at www.rabundoctor.com in an archived format. If you use Twitter, then follow us for health tips and wellness advice @rabundoctor. Until next time, live healthy and be well!