

HELICOBACTER PYLORI

Introduction

Helicobacter pylori (*H. pylori*) is a bacterium which is a cause of some ulcers found in human intestines. These bacteria are also found in some cats¹.

What is *Helicobacter pylori*?

H. pylori is a bacterium found in the stomach. *H. pylori* causes more than 90% of duodenal ulcers and up to 80% of gastric ulcers. Spicy food, acid, stress and lifestyle were considered to be the major causes of ulcers but we now know that most ulcers are caused by *H. pylori* and appropriate antibiotics can eradicate the infection in most patients.

Infection in cats

There are two other strains of this type of bacteria, *H. heilmannii* and *H. felis*, found in cats which can be easily confused with *H. pylori*. *H. heilmannii* has also been found in humans and is suspected of being transmitted from animals to people although it is rare. Both *H. heilmannii* and *H. pylori* infections can be easily prevented through simple hygiene measures.

Infection in Humans

Approximately two-thirds of the world's population is infected with *H.pylori*. Most people who are infected with *H. pylori* never suffer any symptoms but it can cause inflammation of the stomach and duodenal and gastric ulcers. Infected people have a two to six fold risk of developing gastric cancer and mucosal-associated-lymphoid-type (MALT) lymphoma.

Infection in humans

It is not known how *H. pylori* is transmitted or why some patients become symptomatic and others do not.

Some data suggesting domestic cats as being able to carry *H. pylori* has been found but it is widely believed that this cannot infect humans¹.

Diagnosis

Several methods may be used to diagnose *H. pylori* infection. Blood tests can determine if a person has been infected. Another diagnostic method is the breath test, where the patient is given a special type of drink that contains identifiable carbon molecules. The bacterium metabolises the drink, and releases these detectable carbon molecules in the patient's breath.

Treatment and prevention in humans

H. pylori is a bacterium, and in humans it should respond to antibiotics. Unfortunately, the bacteria have proved very difficult to clear from the human stomach. This is probably because it is hard to get high concentrations of an antibiotic into the mucus that lines the stomach. Most treatments involve swallowing several types of tablet simultaneously for 7-8 days.

Almost all *H. pylori* infections can be eradicated if the course of treatment is completed. However, the treatment may cause a range of side effects – particularly abnormal taste, nausea or mild diarrhoea³.

Conclusion

The Pet Health Council would like to reassure cat owners that there is no need to worry, although we do advise that cat owners continue to use normal hygiene routines for handling their pets, such as washing their hands before preparing or eating food and keeping cats away from food preparation areas.

Pets are Good for People

Pets provide us with loyalty, companionship, love and affection, as well as the many physical and psychological benefits. The least we can do to repay this is to ensure that we keep them in the best of health. A healthy pet is a happy pet and a happy pet can help us enjoy a much fuller and more rewarding life.

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References

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For further information, please contact the Pet Health Council on:

Telephone: 020 7379 6545

Email: enquiries@pethealthcouncil.co.uk

Website: www.pethealthcouncil.co.uk