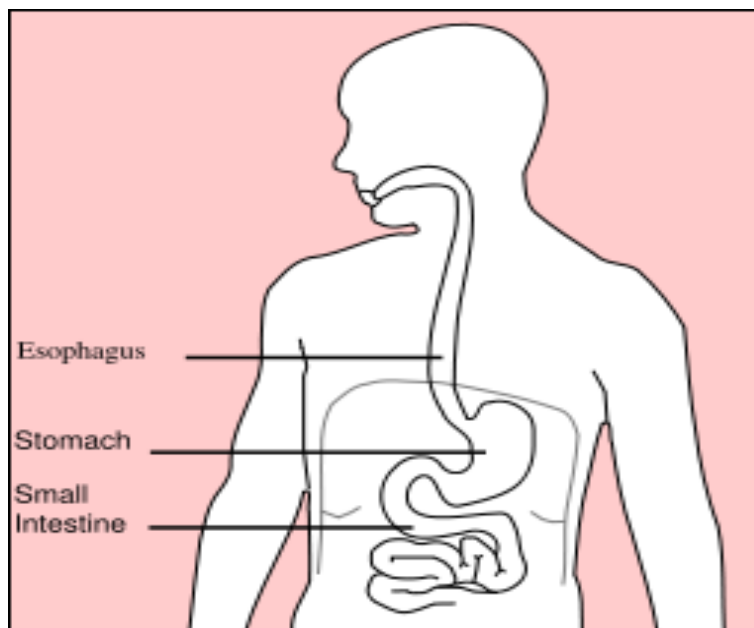


## **COMMON STOMACH DISEASES**

Abdominal illnesses are common and are caused by a variety of agents as well as have many different symptoms. It is important to note that not all abdominal illnesses present with pain.

The stomach is an important organ. It plays a vital role in digestion of foods, releases various enzymes and also protects the lower intestine from harmful organisms. The stomach connects to the esophagus above and to the small intestine below



### **Causes of stomach illnesses**

1. Internal factors such as too high or too low levels of gastric acid and too slow emptying of the stomach
2. External factors which are in most cases responsible for stomach disease - stress, unhealthy diet, excessive consumption of coffee, alcohol and tea, smoking,

certain medications especially non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs like Aspirin and Brufen, and infection with Helicobacter pylori, infection with other bacteria.

### **DYSPEPSIA AND HEARTBURN**

**Dyspepsia** (indigestion) is the most common stomach disease which affects 40-60% of world's population at least once in a lifetime. Caused by both internal/external factors. Characterized by persistent or occasional pain in upper abdomen or in lower chest but can also result regurgitation (reflux of stomach content back into esophagus and mouth), bloating, nausea and vomiting.

**Heartburn** is a burning ache in the esophagus below the breastbone which affects about 10% of world's population. It affects men more often than women and can besides burning sensation in the esophagus also result bad breath, regurgitation, sour or bitter taste in the mouth, vomiting and mouth ulcer. Heartburn can be a result of esophagus motility disorder, regurgitation, and esophagus irritation, while in some people heartburn is also caused by certain foods such as onion, garlic, caffeine containing drinks, tomato, vine and other alcoholic drinks, sukuma wiki, beans, ndengu etc. which greatly depend from person to person. Gassy fizzy drinks e.g. soda may also cause heartburn.

### **DIARRHOEA**

- It can be caused by viruses or bacterial infection, or more seriously by their toxins causing acute food poisoning.
- During digestion, food is stored in the liquid present in the stomach. Undigested food travels to the small intestine and colon in liquid form. These organs begin to absorb the water turning the food into a more solid form. Viruses or bacteria can increase the liquid that is secreted and moves too quickly through the digestive track for the water to be absorbed.
- Two types, acute diarrhea- last for a few days up to a week of time. Chronic diarrhea lasts for several days up to a few weeks and is often a symptom of another chronic disease e.g. HIV or Irritable Bowel.

### **CONSTIPATION**

- Common causes of constipation include inadequate water and fiber intake, a disruption of regular diet or routine like traveling, inadequate activity or exercise, or consumption of large amounts of dairy products among others. Symptoms are easily recognized and are reported as pain, abdominal swelling, and the infrequency of bowel movements or difficulty having them.

- Some infections such as amoeba can cause constipation. Some medication such as antacids, antidiarrhoeals, opioid containing meds e.g. Betapyn and some antidepressants.

### **GASTRITIS**

- Gastritis is inflammation of the stomach lining and has many causes : Most common being *Helicobacter pylori* infection
- Autoimmune disorders, stress, some drugs, excessive alcohol consumption and is often also associated with some medical conditions such as liver or kidney failure and connective tissue disorders
- In the stomach there is a delicate balance between acid and the wall lining which is protected by mucus. When this mucus lining is disrupted for whatever reason, signs and symptoms of acidity result. Disruptions of more than 0.5 cm are known as ulcers.
- This may result in upper abdominal pain, indigestion, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting and heartburn. When the condition is allowed to progress, the pain may become continuous; blood may start to leak and be seen in the stools. If the bleeding is rapid and of adequate volume it may even result in vomiting of bright red blood. When the acidity is uncontrolled, it can even cause severe blood loss (anemia) or lead to perforation (hole) in the stomach which is a surgical emergency. In many individuals, the progressive bleeding from an ulcer mixes with the feces and presents as black stools. Presence of blood in stools is often the first sign that there is a problem in the stomach. As many as 70–90% of ulcers are associated with *Helicobacter pylori*, a spiral-shaped bacterium that lives in the acidic environment of the stomach; however, only 40% of those cases go to a doctor. Stomach Ulcers can also be caused or worsened by drugs such as aspirin, ibuprofen, and other NSAIDs and steroids.

### **CANCERS**

- Cancers of the stomach are rare and the incidence has been declining worldwide. Stomach cancers usually occur in the absence of acidity and may present with vague symptoms of abdominal fullness, weight loss and pain. The actual cause of stomach cancer is not known but has been linked to the *H. pylori* bacteria. Some stomach ulcers may also become malignant. Of all the conditions that can be experienced, cancers of the stomach are among the most serious ones.

Also:Tobacco is known to stimulate acid production and impairs production of the protective mucus. This leads to development of ulcers in the majority of

smokers. Chronic stomach problems have also been linked to excess intake of alcohol. It has been shown that alcohol intake can cause stomach ulcer, gastritis and even stomach cancer. Thus, avoidance of smoking and excess alcohol consumption can help prevent the majority of chronic stomach disorders. The majority of chronic stomach problems are treated medically. However, a change in life style may help. Even though there is no specific food responsible for causing chronic stomach problems, experts recommend eating a healthy diet which consists of fruits and vegetables

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