You have been told you have Helicobacter pylori (H. pylori) which is a bacterium that is commonly found in the stomach. The vast majority of people with H. pylori have no symptoms and never develop problems. Some people, however, develop ulcers in the stomach (gastric ulcers) or in the duodenum (duodenal ulcers) which is part of the small intestine that links the stomach to the large intestine. H. pylori is the most important cause of such ulcers.

How do people acquire H. pylori?

We do not know how H. pylori infection spreads, or why some people develop illness although most people do not. The bacteria probably spread from one person to another through close contact in early childhood. This can be through kissing or through poor hygiene as the bacteria may be passed in stools.

It has been suggested that contaminated food or water may be source of infection, but the evidence is not conclusive.

How H. pylori causes changes

The bacterium invades the protective tissue that lines the stomach. This leads to the release of certain enzymes and toxins. This may directly or indirectly injure the cells of the stomach or duodenum. As a result of these changes the stomach and duodenum are vulnerable to damage from digestive juices e.g. stomach acid.

The result is chronic inflammation in the walls of the stomach (gastritis) and duodenum (duodenitis).

Testing for H. pylori

You have attended for an upper gastrointestinal and during the procedure the endoscopist took a small tissue sample of the lining of your stomach. This was tested for H. pylori. This test proved positive and the endoscopist has explained that you require a course of eradication treatment.

Treatment for H. pylori

No single drug can effectively cure H. pylori. Treatment regimes usually include two antibiotics and a medication called a proton pump inhibitor which decreases the amount of acid produced in the stomach.

Treatment is taken for seven days.

For the treatment to be successful the patient must take the entire course of all medications.

A small number of patients with H. Pylori infection are not cured after the first course of treatment and may need to take a further course of medication for 14 days. this involves a slightly different regime of medication.

If symptoms persist please see your GP.