

## Ulcer Risk Fact Sheet

### **What is a stomach ulcer?**

- A stomach ulcer is like an open sore, where the top layers in the lining of the stomach has eroded. Some people with ulcers may feel discomfort, but most will not.
- If left untreated, stomach ulcers may lead to internal bleeding or more serious conditions that may require hospitalization.

### **What pain medications may put people at risk for stomach ulcers?**

- When taken regularly, certain common prescription and over-the-counter pain relievers, including aspirin, ibuprofen and naproxen, can put some people at risk for stomach ulcers.
- These medicines are known as nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, or NSAIDs. While they are generally safe and effective in treating pain and inflammation caused by arthritis, injury or other ailments, ongoing, regular use can weaken the lining of the stomach, which may allow stomach acid to cause ulcers.

### **Are stomach ulcers serious?**

- If left untreated, some stomach ulcers can erode in to a blood vessel and cause internal bleeding, which may require hospitalization.
- Rarely, a stomach ulcer may create a blockage and require surgery.

### **Who is at risk for stomach ulcers?**

- People taking NSAIDs regularly
  - In fact, as many as 20 percent of those who take NSAID pain relievers daily may develop stomach ulcers
- People over the age of 60, and
- People with a history of stomach ulcers

### **What can be done to reduce the risk of developing a stomach ulcer?**

- If a doctor thinks there may be a risk, a proton pump inhibitor may be prescribed along with your NSAID. PPIs, taken along with an NSAID, can reduce a person's risk for developing a stomach ulcer by limiting the amount of acid the stomach produces.
- Alternatively, a medication known as misoprostol can be prescribed, which can reduce the risk of stomach ulcers from NSAIDs by helping to protect the stomach lining.

### **How are stomach ulcers diagnosed and treated?**

- An x-ray or endoscopy may determine if a stomach ulcer is present. If a doctor determines that a patient has a stomach ulcer, he or she can choose from several types of medications to help treat it:
  - Proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) can decrease the amount of acid the stomach produces allowing the ulcer to heal.
  - H2 blockers can also allow healing by decreasing stomach acid production.
- Doctors may also decide to replace NSAID therapy with a non-NSAID pain reliever to facilitate healing.

*\*It is important to discuss the benefits and risks of any treatment options with your doctor. For more information visit [www.ulcer-risk.com](http://www.ulcer-risk.com)*