

Beating Ulcer-Causing Bugs: Cutting-edge Helicobacter Pylori Tests May Also Halt Cancer and Parkinson's

According to Olga Falkowski, MD, a board-certified pathologist and associate medical director of Acupath Laboratories, in recent months, researchers have made other important discoveries, she says, finding a link between H. pylori and Parkinson's disease and identifying the mechanism by which H. pylori seems to flip the cancer switch in some people.

Plainview, NY ([PRWEB](#)) July 14, 2011 -- Not so long ago, people ignored their chronic stomach aches, blaming a poor diet or stress for their discomfort. But in recent years, doctors have found that gastritis and peptic ulcers are often related to the presence of Helicobacter pylori (or H. pylori), a type of bacteria found in as many as two-thirds of the people in the world, says Olga Falkowski, MD, a board-certified pathologist and associate medical director of Acupath Laboratories, Inc., a national medical laboratory that specializes in gastrointestinal pathology. This discovery was so important, in fact, that the scientists who made it were awarded the Nobel Prize.

In recent months, researchers have made other important discoveries, she says, finding a link between H. pylori and Parkinson's disease and identifying the mechanism by which H. pylori seems to flip the cancer switch in some people. Thus, the tests used to determine the cause of ulcers or gastritis may also help prevent these two diseases, by helping doctors to start treating the H. pylori infection right away.

Most H. pylori infections never cause symptoms, but when they do, the infected person may experience pain, bloating, and other problems. People with H. pylori infections are at increased risk for developing ulcers in the stomach and/or small intestine (gastric or duodenal ulcers), inflammation of the stomach lining (gastritis), and even stomach cancer (H. pylori is the only type of bacteria known to cause cancer).

The Best Tests

There are several tests used to detect an H. pylori infection. Depending on an individual's unique situation, a doctor may order one of the following:

- A breath test. This can determine if the bacteria is present in the patient's stomach (he or she is given a glass of clear liquid that contains carbon, which is absorbed into the bloodstream and lungs and then exhaled). The breath test can determine if you have an active H. pylori infection.
- A blood test. H. pylori bacteria creates serum antibodies—proteins created by the immune system in response to invading H. pylori bacteria—called IgG, IgM, or IgA, which can be detected in simple blood tests. If you have antibodies to H. pylori in your blood, it means you either are currently infected or have been infected in the past.
- A stool test. This tests for H. pylori antigens (molecules that are present in H. pylori bacteria). This test is often done to help support the diagnosis of an H. pylori infection or to determine if treatment for an H. pylori infection was successful.
- A biopsy. Although it's invasive (it requires a doctor to remove a small amount of tissue from the patient's stomach and/or intestine), a biopsy is considered the gold standard of tests. In the lab, the samples can be evaluated in several ways to determine if they contain H. pylori.

Dramatic potential



“There are several theories as to why some people develop disease from H. pylori and others don’t.” Dr. Falkowski says. “Most likely, there are several factors involved, including the type or strain of H. pylori and the individual’s own characteristics—like his or her age and nutritional status,” she says. “Only about 10 percent of people with an H. pylori infection will develop ulcers or gastritis, and only about 1 percent will develop cancer.”

The new research into H. pylori’s relationship to cancer has found that strains of the bacteria that contain a protein called CagA are much more likely to cause inflammation and spur the abnormal cell division and growth of cells that lead to cancer, she explains. “The H. pylori bacteria seems to inject the CagA into the cells that line the stomach, where it disrupts normal cellular functions.”

In the Parkinson’s research, several studies have found that people with the disease were more likely to be infected with H. pylori—and that Parkinson’s patients who were treated and cured of H. pylori infections did better than people who weren’t treated.

All of this shows that testing for H. pylori can be immensely valuable, Dr. Falkowski says. “We know that this bacteria plays an important role in the development of gastric cancer, and we’re learning more and more about the role they play in other diseases, such as Parkinson’s,” she says. “This understanding gives us a whole new way to prevent these diseases.”

Olga Falkowski, M.D. is board-certified in anatomic and clinical pathology by the American Board of Pathology, and serves as the Associate Medical Director and Director of Genetics at Acupath Laboratories, Inc. <http://www.acupath.com>

Acupath Laboratories, Inc. is a Plainview, New York, specialty medical lab engaged in cutting-edge diagnostics. <http://www.acupath.com>

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