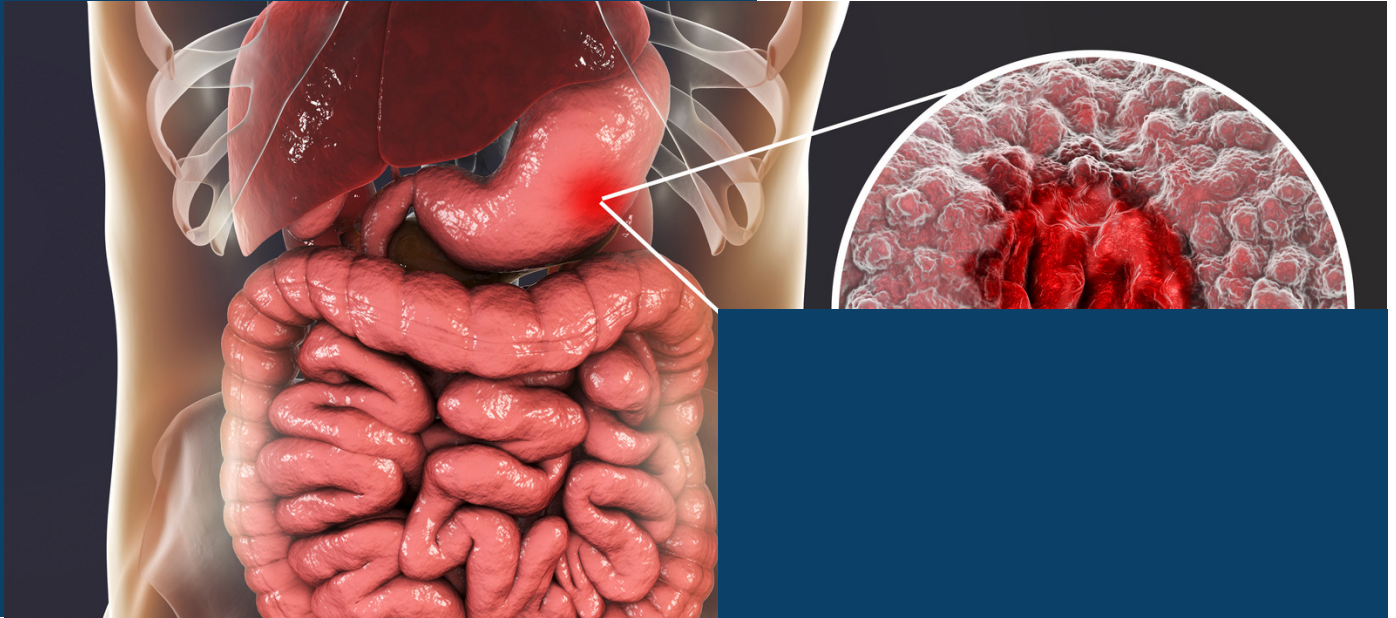


GENERAL SURGERY

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Perforated Ulcers

Welcome to the October newsletter, as a general surgeon, I am committed to empowering patients with knowledge to navigate their healthcare journeys confidently. This month, we look at perforated ulcers.

What is a perforated ulcer?

A perforated ulcer occurs when an untreated peptic ulcer creates a hole through the wall of the stomach or duodenum. This allows stomach acid, bile and digestive juices to leak into the abdominal cavity, causing sudden and severe infection (peritonitis). It is a surgical emergency that can be fatal if not treated quickly.

Why does it happen?

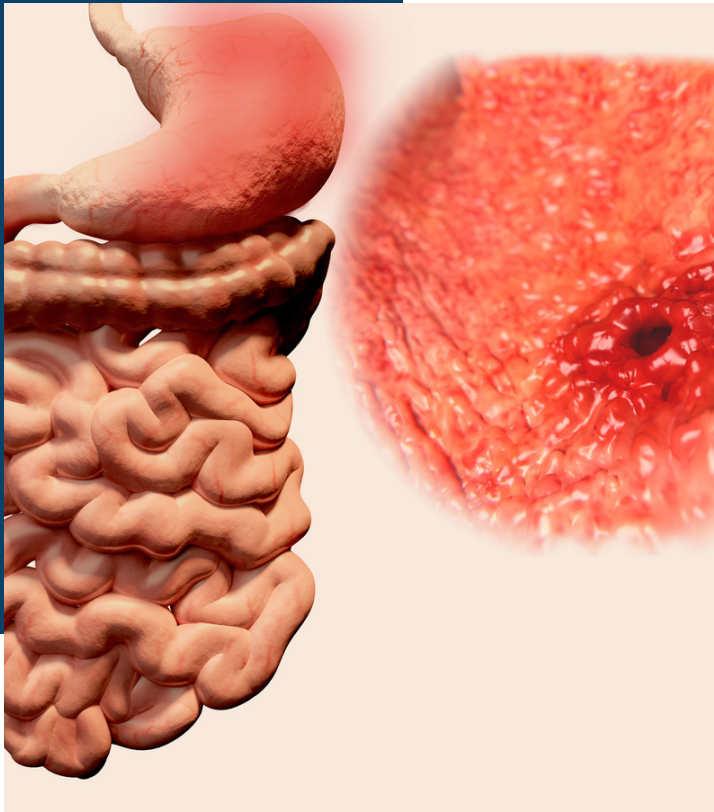
Most ulcers are caused by *Helicobacter pylori* infection or long-term use of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen or aspirin. Smoking, excessive alcohol intake and stress can worsen the problem. If these ulcers go untreated, the erosion can progress until a hole forms.

General Surgery News

I pick a topic each month and discuss it in detail on my social media accounts.



Dr. Tendani Muthambi
Specialist General Surgeon



Perforated ulcers and surgery

Once a perforated ulcer is diagnosed, surgery is almost always required. The goals of surgery are to:

Close the perforation: The hole in the stomach or duodenum is usually sealed with stitches, often reinforced with a piece of the patient's own tissue (known as a Graham patch).

Wash out infection: The abdominal cavity is irrigated thoroughly to remove leaked stomach contents to reduce the risk of sepsis.

Address underlying causes: In some cases, more extensive surgery may be needed, such as removing a portion of the stomach if the ulcer is large or recurrent.

What are the warning signs?

A common symptom of a perforated ulcer is sudden, intense abdominal pain, often described as "like a knife" in the stomach. The abdomen quickly becomes rigid, breathing is shallow and patients may feel faint, nauseated or they can even collapse. This is not the kind of pain you can ignore, a perforated ulcer is always an emergency.

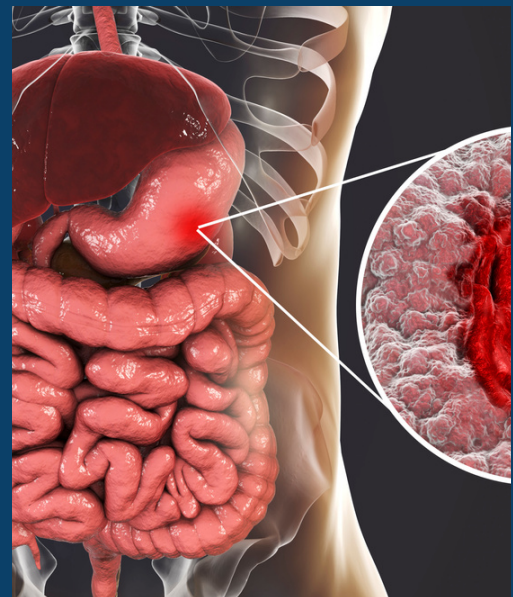
Why immediate care matters?

Once perforation occurs, digestive contents leak into the abdominal cavity, causing widespread infection and sepsis. Without urgent surgery, the risk of death is very high. The surgical team will usually repair the hole and wash out the abdominal cavity to control the infection. Delay in treatment significantly reduces survival.

Prevention and long-term management

The good news is that perforated ulcers are preventable. Treating *H. pylori* infections with antibiotics, using acid-suppressing medications, avoiding long-term NSAID use, quitting smoking and moderating alcohol intake all reduce the risk. Patients with chronic heartburn or ulcers should see their doctor regularly to prevent complications.

Final thoughts



A perforated ulcer is a dangerous but preventable emergency. Surgery saves lives, but prevention and early treatment are even more powerful. Recognising the warning signs, seeking immediate medical attention and addressing the underlying causes can make the difference between life and death.