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THE HISTORY OF HELICOBACTER PYLORI, DUODENAL ULCER, GASTRIC ULCER, AND GASTRIC CANCER

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Introduction

Abstract. *Helicobacter pylori (H. pylori) is a spiral-shaped bacterium that inhabits the stomach lining of many individuals worldwide. Over the years, it has been strongly associated with a number of gastrointestinal disorders, including duodenal ulcers, gastric ulcers, and gastric cancer. The historical journey of the understanding of H. pylori and its role in gastric diseases has transformed medical knowledge, leading to new methods of diagnosis, treatment, and prevention. This article delves into the history of Helicobacter pylori, its connection to peptic ulcers, and its role in the development of gastric cancer.*

Keywords: *Campylobacter pyloridis, gastrin-producing cells, eradication, metaplasia, dysplasia, gastric adenocarcinoma.*

ИСТОРИЯ HELICOBACTER PYLORI, ЯЗВЫ ДВЕНАДЦАТИПЕРСТНОЙ КИШКИ, ЯЗВЫ ЖЕЛУДКА И РАКА ЖЕЛУДКА

Аннотация. *Helicobacter pylori (H. pylori) — спиралевидная бактерия, обитающая в слизистой оболочке желудка многих людей по всему миру. На протяжении многих лет она тесно связана с рядом желудочно-кишечных расстройств, включая язву двенадцатиперстной кишки, язву желудка и рак желудка.*

Исторический путь понимания H. pylori и ее роли в желудочных заболеваниях изменил медицинские знания, что привело к появлению новых методов диагностики, лечения и профилактики. В этой статье рассматривается история Helicobacter pylori, ее связь с пептическими язвами и ее роль в развитии рака желудка.

Ключевые слова: *Campylobacter pyloridis, клетки, продуцирующие гастрин, эрадикация, метаплазия, дисплазия, аденокарцинома желудка.*

The Discovery of Helicobacter pylori

The story of Helicobacter pylori began in the early 1980s when two Australian researchers, **Barry Marshall** and **Robin Warren**, made a groundbreaking discovery.

Before this, the prevailing medical belief was that peptic ulcers (which include both duodenal and gastric ulcers) were caused primarily by stress, spicy foods, or an excess of stomach acid.

In 1982, Marshall and Warren isolated a previously unknown bacterium from the stomach lining of patients suffering from chronic gastritis and peptic ulcers. They identified this bacterium as *Campylobacter pyloridis* (later renamed Helicobacter pylori due to its unique shape and characteristics). The researchers noted that the bacterium was found in the stomach of nearly all patients with gastritis and ulcers.

Barry Marshall famously drank a culture of H. pylori to prove that the bacterium could cause gastritis and lead to peptic ulcers. Within days, he developed symptoms of gastritis, which further solidified the link between H. pylori and ulcer formation.

For this pioneering work, Marshall and Warren were awarded the **Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine** in 2005, a recognition that forever changed the understanding of gastrointestinal diseases.

1. The Discovery of Helicobacter pylori and Duodenal Ulcers

The connection between **Helicobacter pylori** and **duodenal ulcers** represents one of the most important breakthroughs in gastroenterology over the past few decades. Before the discovery of **H. pylori**, the causes of **duodenal ulcers** were largely attributed to factors such as stress, diet, excessive acid production, and lifestyle. However, in the early 1980s, a groundbreaking discovery by **Barry Marshall** and **Robin Warren** completely revolutionized the understanding of ulcer formation, particularly in relation to the **duodenum**.

2. The Pioneering Discovery by Barry Marshall and Robin Warren

The story of **Helicobacter pylori** begins in 1982 when **Robin Warren**, an Australian pathologist, first observed that **H. pylori**, a spiral-shaped bacterium, was consistently found in the stomach lining of patients with chronic gastritis and duodenal ulcers. Warren initially noted this during routine examination of biopsy samples taken from patients with stomach complaints. His observations suggested that **H. pylori** was often present in these patients, but it wasn’t immediately clear what role the bacterium played in the ulcerative process.

At the time, **duodenal ulcers** were primarily attributed to **excessive stomach acid** or lifestyle factors such as smoking, stress, and poor diet. The prevailing theory was that an imbalance in gastric acid production led to ulcer formation, with little consideration for infectious causes.

3. **Barry Marshall's Self-Experiment and Confirmation of the Theory**

While Warren was unsure about the causative role of **H. pylori**, **Barry Marshall**, a young physician working in the same department, became increasingly convinced that the bacterium might be the key factor. Marshall hypothesized that **H. pylori** could be responsible for not just gastritis but also for causing **peptic ulcers**, including **duodenal ulcers**.

To prove his theory, Marshall decided to take the drastic step of drinking a culture of **H. pylori** himself. In doing so, he hoped to induce an infection and demonstrate the bacterium's role in ulcer development. After drinking the culture, Marshall developed symptoms of **gastritis**, which were confirmed by endoscopic examination. He showed that **H. pylori** could cause inflammation in the stomach and duodenum, supporting the idea that the bacterium was indeed the primary cause of ulcers.

Marshall and Warren's research ultimately led to the conclusion that **H. pylori** infection was a major cause of both **gastric** and **duodenal ulcers**. Their discovery turned the prevailing view of ulcers on its head, shifting the focus from lifestyle factors and stomach acid alone to an infectious origin.

4. **Nobel Prize and Recognition**

In recognition of their groundbreaking work, Marshall and Warren were awarded the **Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine** in **2005**. Their discovery had profound implications for the treatment of ulcers and significantly advanced the field of gastroenterology. The work also changed the way doctors approached the treatment of **duodenal ulcers**, leading to more effective therapies based on eradicating the bacterial infection rather than just reducing stomach acid.

5. The Role of Helicobacter pylori in Duodenal Ulcers

The mechanism by which **H. pylori** causes **duodenal ulcers** involves several key steps:

1. **Invasion of the Mucosal Lining**:

• **H. pylori** survives the acidic environment of the stomach by producing **urease**, an enzyme that neutralizes stomach acid. This allows the bacterium to colonize the mucosal lining of the stomach and duodenum. The bacterium's spiral shape helps it burrow into the protective mucus layer of the stomach lining.

2. **Induction of Inflammation**:

• Once **H. pylori** attaches to the stomach and duodenal lining, it triggers an immune response. The body's immune system sends inflammatory cells (such as **neutrophils** and **macrophages**) to the site of infection, which results in chronic inflammation of the stomach and

duodenum (gastritis and duodenitis). This inflammation weakens the mucosal barrier, making it more vulnerable to the effects of stomach acid.

3. **Damage to the Mucosal Barrier**:

- The bacteria release toxins (such as **CagA** and **VacA**) that contribute to mucosal damage. This damage to the protective mucus layer makes the duodenal lining more susceptible to the corrosive effects of gastric acid, which can ultimately lead to the formation of an ulcer.

4. **Increased Acid Production**:

- **H. pylori** infection can also stimulate the stomach to produce more acid. In some cases, the bacterium affects the **gastrin-producing cells** in the stomach, increasing acid secretion. This higher acid production contributes to the injury of the duodenum, exacerbating the ulcerative process.

5. **Gastric Motility Changes**:

- **H. pylori** may also affect gastric motility, slowing the emptying of food from the stomach into the duodenum. This delay can increase the exposure of the duodenal lining to stomach acid, which is a contributing factor to ulcer formation.

How Helicobacter pylori Causes Duodenal Ulcers

The development of **duodenal ulcers** due to **H. pylori** infection involves several key mechanisms:

1. Infection of the Stomach and Duodenal Lining:

- **H. pylori** is a bacterium that thrives in the acidic environment of the stomach. It attaches to the **gastric mucosa** (stomach lining) and can also affect the duodenum. The bacterium produces an enzyme called **urease**, which neutralizes stomach acid, creating a more favorable environment for the bacterium.

2. Chronic Inflammation:

- **H. pylori** infection triggers a chronic **inflammatory response** in the stomach and duodenum. The body's immune system sends inflammatory cells to the infected area, which leads to ongoing tissue damage. Over time, this chronic inflammation can weaken the mucosal barrier that protects the stomach and duodenal lining from stomach acid, making the lining more susceptible to damage.

3. Disruption of the Mucosal Barrier:

- The duodenum and stomach are lined with a protective mucus layer that shields the tissue from the corrosive effects of stomach acid. **H. pylori** damages this protective layer. As the

infection continues, the duodenum becomes more vulnerable to the digestive effects of gastric acid. This damage can result in the formation of ulcers.

4. **Increased Acid Production**:

- **H. pylori** infection can lead to **increased acid production** in the stomach. The bacterium's ability to alter gastric function and increase acid secretion is thought to contribute to the formation of ulcers, especially in the duodenum, where the mucosal lining is thinner and more sensitive to acidic injury.

5. **Virulence Factors of H. pylori**:

• Some strains of **H. pylori**, such as those with the **CagA gene** (Cytotoxin-associated gene A), are more virulent and more strongly associated with duodenal ulcers. These strains cause more aggressive inflammation and can lead to greater damage to the mucosal lining, increasing the likelihood of ulcer formation.

Epidemiology and Prevalence of H. pylori in Duodenal Ulcers

Helicobacter pylori is found in about **80-90%** of individuals with **duodenal ulcers**, making it the primary cause of the condition. In populations with high rates of **H. pylori** infection, such as in parts of **Asia**, **Africa**, and **Latin America**, the prevalence of **duodenal ulcers** is also high.

However, not all individuals infected with **H. pylori** will develop ulcers. This suggests that additional factors, such as genetic susceptibility, lifestyle choices (e.g., smoking, alcohol consumption), and the specific strain of **H. pylori** present, contribute to the development of duodenal ulcers.

The Link Between Helicobacter pylori and Gastric Ulcers

Helicobacter pylori is a spiral-shaped bacterium that has long been associated with various gastrointestinal disorders, including **gastric ulcers**. Gastric ulcers are open sores or lesions that develop on the lining of the stomach, causing pain and discomfort, particularly after eating. For many years, the cause of gastric ulcers was widely believed to be linked to stress, spicy foods, or excessive stomach acid. However, the discovery of **H. pylori** in the early 1980s revolutionized the understanding of this condition.

Discovery of Helicobacter pylori and Its Role in Gastric Ulcers

The discovery of **Helicobacter pylori** by **Barry Marshall** and **Robin Warren** in 1982 marked a turning point in the field of gastroenterology. Prior to this, ulcers were thought to be the result of lifestyle factors, such as stress, smoking, or a high-fat diet.

However, Marshall and Warren showed that **H. pylori** was present in the stomach lining of patients with chronic gastritis and ulcers, and their studies demonstrated that the bacterium could cause inflammation and damage to the stomach's protective mucus layer.

Barry Marshall's famous self-experiment, where he drank a culture of **H. pylori** and developed gastritis, helped confirm the bacterium's role in causing ulcers. For their work, Marshall and Warren were awarded the **Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine** in 2005.

How H. pylori Causes Gastric Ulcers

The development of **gastric ulcers** is strongly linked to the chronic infection of the stomach lining by **H. pylori**. The bacterium disrupts the stomach's mucosal defense mechanisms, leading to ulcer formation. Here's how the infection leads to the development of gastric ulcers:

1. **Invasion of the Stomach Lining**:

- **H. pylori** infects the stomach lining and attaches itself to the epithelial cells of the stomach. It is uniquely adapted to survive in the harsh acidic environment of the stomach, where most bacteria would be killed.

2. **Inflammatory Response**:

- Once **H. pylori** colonizes the stomach lining, it induces a chronic **inflammatory response**. The body's immune system reacts to the bacteria by producing various immune molecules, including **cytokines** and **chemokines**, which recruit white blood cells to the site of infection.
- This chronic inflammation leads to damage to the stomach lining over time.

3. **Damage to the Mucosal Barrier**:

- The stomach lining has a protective layer of mucus that shields the underlying cells from stomach acid. **H. pylori** damages this protective barrier by releasing **urease**, an enzyme that converts urea into ammonia. Ammonia neutralizes stomach acid, allowing the bacteria to survive, but this also weakens the mucosal barrier, making it more susceptible to damage from the acidic environment.

4. **Increased Acid Production**:

- **H. pylori** infection can stimulate the **gastric acid secretion** process, further damaging the stomach lining. The increased acid production leads to erosion of the mucosal lining, which can eventually result in ulcer formation.

5. **Toxins Produced by H. pylori**:

• Certain strains of **H. pylori** produce **vacA** (vacuolating cytotoxin A) and **CagA** (Cytotoxin-associated gene A) proteins. These toxins damage the stomach lining and lead to the development of ulcers. The **CagA-positive strains** are considered more virulent and are associated with an increased risk of gastric ulcers and gastric cancer.

Epidemiology and Prevalence of H. pylori in Gastric Ulcers

Studies have shown that **H. pylori** infection is present in the majority of patients with **gastric ulcers**. It is estimated that approximately **70-90%** of patients with gastric ulcers have **H. pylori** infection. The bacterium is more prevalent in populations with lower socioeconomic status, particularly in areas with poor sanitation and overcrowding.

The infection is usually acquired in childhood and can persist for decades if left untreated. In fact, untreated **H. pylori** infection is a major risk factor for the recurrence of gastric ulcers. It is particularly common in regions of the world where the bacterium is widespread, such as in parts of **Asia**, **Africa**, and **Latin America**.

Gastric Cancer: The Role of Helicobacter pylori

Gastric cancer (GC), also known as stomach cancer, is one of the most common and deadly cancers globally, particularly in regions such as East Asia, Eastern Europe, and South America. Over the years, extensive research has established a significant link between **Helicobacter pylori (H. pylori)** infection and the development of gastric cancer. This section explores the historical background, mechanisms, and current understanding of how H. pylori contributes to the onset of gastric cancer.

Historical Context

The connection between **Helicobacter pylori** and gastric cancer has evolved over the years. In the early 1990s, **H. pylori** was initially recognized as a causative agent of **gastritis** and **peptic ulcers**. However, by the mid-1990s, research began to suggest that chronic infection with the bacterium could lead to more severe complications, including **gastric cancer**.

In 1994, the **World Health Organization (WHO)** classified **H. pylori** as a **Group 1 carcinogen** (the highest risk category), recognizing its critical role in the development of gastric cancer. This classification was based on a growing body of evidence linking **long-term H. pylori** infection to both **gastritis** and **gastric cancer**, particularly **gastric adenocarcinoma**.

1. Mechanisms by Which H. pylori Contributes to Gastric Cancer

The exact mechanisms by which **H. pylori** induces gastric cancer are complex and involve several factors:

2. **Chronic Inflammation**:

• The most established mechanism involves **chronic inflammation**. H. pylori infection induces a persistent inflammatory response in the stomach lining. The immune system's response to the bacterium leads to the release of pro-inflammatory cytokines and other molecules that cause long-term damage to the gastric mucosa.

• This chronic inflammation is thought to be a key factor in the development of **precancerous lesions** such as **intestinal metaplasia**, **dysplasia**, and ultimately **gastric adenocarcinoma**.

2. Alteration of Gastric Environment:

• H. pylori infection disrupts the balance of the stomach's **microbiome** and alters the acid-producing cells in the gastric lining. In response to the infection, the stomach may produce more acid, leading to further damage of the mucosal lining.

• Some strains of **H. pylori** carry the **CagA gene** (Cytotoxin-associated gene A), which is associated with a more aggressive form of infection. The CagA protein is believed to directly interact with the host cell's signaling pathways, inducing changes in cellular function that may promote cancerous transformation.

3. DNA Damage and Mutagenesis:

• Long-term H. pylori infection has been shown to cause **DNA damage** in gastric epithelial cells. The bacterium produces various **toxins**, such as **vacA** (vacuolating cytotoxin A), which can cause cellular injury and stress, promoting genetic mutations in the host cells.

• These mutations can accumulate over time, leading to the formation of **precancerous lesions** and eventually **gastric cancer**.

4. Increased Risk of Helicobacter pylori-Induced Gastric Cancer:

• Certain factors increase the risk of **gastric cancer** in individuals infected with **H. pylori**, including:

▪ **Strain virulence**: Some strains of H. pylori, such as those that possess the **CagA gene**, are more likely to cause severe disease and are strongly linked to gastric cancer.

▪ **Chronicity of infection**: Long-term, untreated infection increases the likelihood of developing precancerous changes in the stomach lining.

▪ **Environmental and lifestyle factors**: Diet (e.g., high salt intake, smoking, and alcohol consumption) and genetic factors can exacerbate the carcinogenic effects of **H. pylori** infection.

Epidemiological Evidence Linking H. pylori to Gastric Cancer

Numerous large-scale epidemiological studies and clinical trials have demonstrated the relationship between **H. pylori infection** and **gastric cancer**:

- A landmark study by **Uemura et al.** (2001) found that individuals infected with **H. pylori** had a significantly higher risk of developing gastric cancer compared to those without infection. The study highlighted that the eradication of **H. pylori** could reduce the incidence of gastric cancer in high-risk populations.
- Another study published by **Correa et al.** (1990) demonstrated that **chronic H. pylori infection** is a central factor in the development of **intestinal-type gastric cancer**, which is the most common form of gastric cancer.
- **Global studies** have also shown that populations with high rates of **H. pylori infection**, such as in parts of **China**, **Japan**, and **South Korea**, also have high incidence rates of gastric cancer. This correlation is especially strong in countries where **gastric cancer** remains a leading cause of cancer-related deaths.

Prevention and Eradication of H. pylori as a Strategy for Gastric Cancer Prevention

Given the established role of **H. pylori** in gastric cancer, efforts have been made to explore its eradication as a means of preventing the disease.

1. **Helicobacter pylori Eradication Therapy**:

- The standard approach to **H. pylori eradication** involves a combination of antibiotics (such as **clarithromycin**, **amoxicillin**, and **metronidazole**) and **proton pump inhibitors (PPIs)** to reduce stomach acid. This regimen is highly effective in eliminating the bacterium from the stomach.
- For individuals at high risk of gastric cancer, particularly those with **intestinal metaplasia** or a family history of gastric cancer, early eradication therapy may help reduce the long-term risk of developing cancer.

2. **Screening and Early Detection**:

- In regions with a high incidence of gastric cancer, **H. pylori screening** is often recommended, particularly for individuals over 50. Early detection and treatment of **H. pylori** infection may prevent the development of cancerous changes in the gastric mucosa.
- **Endoscopy** and **biopsy** remain key diagnostic tools for detecting precancerous lesions, although non-invasive tests like the **urea breath test** and **stool antigen test** are becoming more widely used.

3. **Vaccination**:

• Although **vaccines** for **H. pylori** are still under development, the idea of **preventing H. pylori infection** via vaccination is being actively researched. A successful vaccine would not only reduce the incidence of peptic ulcers but also potentially lower the global burden of gastric cancer.

Advances in Diagnosis and Treatment

The understanding of Helicobacter pylori's role in peptic ulcers and gastric cancer has prompted major advancements in diagnosis and treatment. Initially, diagnosing H. pylori infection involved invasive methods such as **endoscopy** and **biopsy**. However, less invasive tests have since been developed, including **urea breath tests**, **stool antigen tests**, and **serologic tests**. These methods have made it easier for doctors to detect the bacterium in patients.

Treatment for H. pylori infection generally consists of a combination of antibiotics (such as clarithromycin, amoxicillin, and metronidazole) and acid-suppressing medications (like proton pump inhibitors or H2 blockers). This approach, known as **triple therapy** or **quadruple therapy**, has proven highly effective in eradicating the infection and healing ulcers.

In regions with high gastric cancer prevalence, some researchers are exploring the possibility of using H. pylori eradication as a preventive measure against gastric cancer. Early studies suggest that treating H. pylori infection may reduce the risk of developing gastric cancer, especially when done before the appearance of precancerous lesions.

Conclusion

The history of Helicobacter pylori, duodenal ulcers, gastric ulcers, and gastric cancer has dramatically changed over the past few decades. From the initial skepticism surrounding Marshall and Warren's discovery of H. pylori, to the current understanding of its critical role in both peptic ulcers and gastric cancer, the scientific community has made great strides in improving the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of these diseases.

As more research continues, we are likely to see further advancements in the management of H. pylori infections, including more targeted therapies and potential vaccines. The understanding of H. pylori’s role in gastrointestinal health continues to shape the future of medicine, and its history remains a testament to the power of scientific discovery.

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