

## Ulcers Can Be Prevented, Cured

By: Wendy Hladick, PA-C

Fisherman Frank has an ulcer. He's been working furiously since the beginning of May in hope of having his boat, gear and fishing crew together. He has bills to pay and is worried about the fishing season. No wonder he has an ulcer, right?

Maybe.

Ulcers, holes or breaks in the inner lining of the esophagus, stomach or first part of the small intestine are not necessarily caused by stress. They may not be caused by spicy, hot foods, although both these things may aggravate the stomach or increase your risk of ulcers.

Excess stomach acid was believed to be one of the main reasons people suffered from ulcers, but within the last ten years, a bacteria called "H. pylori" has proved to have a stronger association with ulcers. H. pylori breaks down the stomach lining and can cause ulcer disease.

Classic symptoms of ulcers are burning pain in the upper abdomen, often worse at night or when the stomach is empty. The pain is commonly relieved by food. But, some people have no symptoms at all and some only experience bleeding, which is the most serious complication of ulcer disease.

Dyspepsia, abdominal distress without proven ulcer disease, is extremely common and easily treated with an antacid. Prolonged discomfort or severe pain can be very serious, however, and if one experiences this, he or she should see a health provider.

Ulcers can't always be prevented but you can reduce your risk by following these guidelines:

- Avoid foods that cause you discomfort. No single diet has proven to either prevent ulcers or promote healing.
- Stop smoking. Smoking irritates the lining of the stomach and if you have ulcers, quitting will promote healing.
- Cut back or cut out caffeine and alcohol. They stimulate acid production and hurt an existing ulcer.
- If you take aspirin or ibuprofen, take it with food. Food helps buffer the stomach.
- Keep the stress in your life in perspective. If we didn't have a little stress in our life there wouldn't be a reason to get out of bed in the morning.

One out of 10 adults in the United States is likely to experience ulcer disease – men slightly more than women. Even though it's not known exactly what causes ulcers, treatments for them are better than ever.

Fantastic fishing, Frank!