Ulcer-causing H. pylori may be linked to diabetes

By ACSH Staff — March 16, 2012

There may be an unexpected culprit contributing to the incidence of Type 2 diabetes, suggests new research [1] in the Journal of Infectious Diseases. The latest study found that the bacterium H. pylori (Helicobacter pylori) the cause of most stomach ulcers was also linked to higher levels [2] of blood sugar, the diagnostic hallmark of diabetes.

Researchers from the New York University Langone Medical Center analyzed data on more than 6,000 adults and children aged three and older who participated in the 1999-2000 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), as well as over 7,000 adults from the older NHANES III. They found that adults who had H. pylori infections, even if they had no symptoms of stomach ulcers, were more likely to have higher blood sugar levels than those who were not infected with the bacteria.

Most people who are infected with H. pylori have no symptoms and are unaware of the infection. However, if symptoms most commonly related to ulcers are troubling, treatment is possible. Eradicating H. pylori requires a several-week course of three antibiotics, ACSH’s Dr. Gilbert Ross explains. If H. pylori does turn out to have an effect on the development of diabetes, its eradication may well reduce the incidence and toll of diabetes.

The study’s lead author recommends that future research into this link, including how eliminating H. pylori affects blood sugar levels, as well as how diabetes develops in older people who are overweight, may provide insight into whether treating H. pylori infection may help such individuals avoid developing diabetes.