

Disturbed digestion common in HK

Dyspepsia, or disturbed digestion, is common in Hong Kong. About 10 to 20 per cent of people here suffer from this problem. Dyspepsia is due mostly to the stomach not functioning properly. Its symptoms include stomachache, bloating of the stomach, belching, nausea, feeling full after a very light meal, and heartburn.

Some gastrointestinal diseases, such as peptic ulcer and gastric cancer, may produce similar symptoms. Dyspepsia sufferers may experience pain or difficulty swallowing things, loss of appetite, weight loss, may discharge dark colour stool, or even vomit blood. People over 45 years of age getting dyspepsia, or experiencing these symptoms for the first time, should see a doctor. *Helicobacter pylori*, a bacterium that causes chronic inflammation of the inner lining of the stomach, may also be associated with dyspepsia. 30% to 40% of the patients have a relief in symptoms when the infection is treated.

Normal treatment for dyspepsia is usually directed at the symptoms, not the disease that causes it. Some drugs can relieve the symptoms but not all patients respond well to them. Some patients may have to take long-term medication. Eating small amounts of food more frequently can relieve the discomfort. Avoiding certain foods, stress, and exercising regularly can also help to reduce the symptoms.