

## **MANAGING YOUR MALLORY-WEISS TEAR**

### **What Is Mallory-Weiss Tear?**

The esophagus is the tube that carries food from the mouth to the stomach. A Mallory-Weiss tear is a tear in the tissue lining the esophagus, called the mucous membrane. It often occurs near the place where the esophagus joins the stomach. Most people with this tear are men who are often heavy alcohol users. Women and children can also have it.

### **What Causes Mallory-Weiss Tear?**

The usual cause is forceful or long-lasting vomiting in which the upper esophageal sphincter doesn't relax. This sphincter is a muscular valve at the upper esophagus that can make the diameter of the esophagus smaller. Coughing, vomiting from pregnancy, straining during bowel movements, trauma, and inflammation of the esophagus (esophagitis) and stomach (gastritis) can also cause it. It's not contagious or passed from parents to children.

### **What Are the Symptoms of Mallory-Weiss Tear?**

Symptoms include vomiting blood or passing large amounts of blood from the rectum. Others are lasting heartburn, pain in the abdomen (belly) or back, dizziness, lightheadedness, and fainting.

### **How Is Mallory-Weiss Tear Diagnosed?**

For diagnosis, the doctor uses upper endoscopy. The endoscope is a long flexible tube with a lighted end that the health care provider puts into the mouth or rectum. The endoscope lets the doctor see into the esophagus, stomach, and duodenum (part of the small intestine). The doctor can collect samples of tissue (biopsy), take pictures, and stop bleeding.

## **How Is Mallory-Weiss Tear Treated?**

Mallory-Weiss tears usually heal on their own without any major treatment. However, the first treatment is to monitor vital signs (blood pressure and pulse). Fluids are given intravenously (into a vein) for low blood pressure. This low pressure can occur during periods of massive bleeding. The health care provider may also suggest blood transfusions if blood is lost too quickly. Some people need medicines or surgery to stop the bleeding. For long-lasting bleeding, a gastroenterologist or surgeon may be involved in care. Gastroenterologists are specialists in diseases of the esophagus, stomach, and intestines. They use endoscopes to give drugs such as vasopressin or inject other medicines over the tear to stop bleeding.

## **DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Mallory-Weiss Tear**

- ✓ **DO** realize that Mallory-Weiss tears usually heal within 96 hours, so tears may not be found by upper endoscopy if endoscopy is delayed.
- ✓ **DO** understand that in the hospital, you may not have anything to eat until the cause of bleeding is found and bleeding stops. Then, you may change from drinking clear liquids (e.g., water, ginger ale, gelatin) to eating a regular diet, as tolerated.
- ✓ **DO** feel reassured that almost all Mallory-Weiss tears don't bleed again.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you vomit blood or pass blood from your rectum or if you're pregnant and vomiting. Call if you have abdominal pain or lasting heartburn or feel dizzy or lightheaded.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you have problems with alcohol.

⊗ **DON'T** forget that pregnancy and morning sickness with vomiting can lead to a

Mallory-Weiss tear.

⊗ **DON'T** forget that the prognosis for people with Mallory-Weiss tears is very good.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following sources:

- National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse: Tel: (800) 891-5389; Website:  
<http://www.niddk.nih.gov/health/digest/digest.htm>
- American College of Gastroenterology: Tel: (703) 820-7400; Website:  
<http://www.acg.gi.org>

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