Research Summary: H. Pylori #2

As featured in Dr. Kenny Mittelstadt's video:
"Foods That Help Fight Helicobacter Pylori Naturally"
Date of Publication: 12/24/2025

Research Context:

This week's topic explores how healing from H. pylori isn't just about attacking the bacteria - it's about how we can reshape the stomach's environment through food. When you're living with H. pylori, every meal can feel like a gamble.

You might be exhausted by the idea of another round of antibiotics, or maybe you've tried them and the infection came back. But what if instead of thinking about foods that "kill" the infection, we focused on foods that crowd out the bad while supporting your stomach's natural ability to heal?

The research shows us something powerful: when you change the terrain of your stomach - making it less friendly to H. pylori and more supportive of beneficial bacteria - your body's own healing systems can finally get traction. Below are the key studies that help connect these dots and show why aggressive approaches alone might be missing the bigger picture of creating an environment where your stomach can actually recover.

Key Findings from the Research:

Study 1 (PMID 31464895):
Researchers in South Korea studied 142 people with H. pylori who received either fermented milk with beneficial bacteria (Lactobacillus paracasei) and licorice root, or plain fermented milk for 8 weeks. The probiotic group showed a meaningful drop in H. pylori levels - from 20.8 down to 16.9 on breath tests - along with less inflammation under the microscope and better digestive comfort. What makes this particularly encouraging is that people reported improvements in their quality of life without any serious side effects. This suggests that fermented foods rich in beneficial bacteria help shift the stomach's terrain, making it less hospitable for H. pylori.

Study 2 (PMID 36604137):
This 2023 analysis examined 12 clinical trials testing polyphenol-rich foods - curcumin, cranberry, garlic, licorice, and broccoli - in people with H. pylori. People using polyphenol compounds alongside standard treatment had a 19% better chance of clearing their infection without additional side effects. The foods weren't curative on their own, but they made conventional treatments work better. Think of polyphenols as the compounds that give fruits and vegetables their vibrant colors - they calm down the inflammatory background noise in your stomach, allowing treatments to work more predictably and your body to respond more effectively.

Study 3 (PMID 35831736):
Chinese researchers gave 110 people with H. pylori either broccoli seed extract or placebo for 2 months. While it didn't eliminate H. pylori in most people, it significantly lowered inflammatory markers like IL-8 and TNF-alpha (signals that tell us how irritated the stomach lining is). This matters because when inflammation runs high, even the right foods and treatments struggle to gain traction. The broccoli compounds help manage oxidative stress and keep immune responses balanced, making your stomach more receptive to healing rather than staying stuck in chronic reactivity. It's about creating the conditions for recovery, not just fighting the infection.

Functional Medicine Connections:

Here's how these pieces fit together: Your stomach isn't just a container for food - it's part of a larger ecosystem that includes your immune system, gut microbiome, and inflammatory response. When H. pylori takes hold, it creates "system load" where the bacteria irritates your stomach lining, triggering inflammation that makes your immune system less effective, which makes the lining more vulnerable. The cycle feeds itself. Food can interrupt this cycle at multiple points. Fermented foods crowd out H. pylori by repopulating your stomach with beneficial organisms.

Polyphenol-rich foods like berries, turmeric, and green tea turn down the inflammatory background noise so your immune system can respond more clearly. Cruciferous vegetables like broccoli help your cells handle oxidative stress and protect the stomach lining during repair.

This is why the "terrain shift" approach often works better than trying to eliminate the infection by force alone. When your microbiome is more balanced, inflammation is lower, and your stomach lining is better protected, H. pylori has a harder time maintaining its grip, and standard treatments become more effective.

Practical Reflections & Takeaways:

Think about your own patterns: When your stomach symptoms were at their worst, were you eating fewer vegetables, skipping fermented foods, or relying on processed foods? That rock-in-your-stomach feeling or unpredictable flares aren't random - they're your body showing you where the communication is breaking down.
If your symptoms spike during high-stress weeks even when your diet hasn't changed, that's a clue about how much your nervous system influences digestive healing. If certain colorful vegetables or fermented foods calm things down, that's meaningful data about what your body responds to.
What small shift could you make this week? Maybe add sauerkraut to one meal, have berries with breakfast, or lightly steam some broccoli. Small, consistent shifts in terrain often matter more than dramatic interventions you can't sustain.

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