Dr. Kenny Mittelstadt
ROOT CAUSE HEALTH DETECTIVE

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YOUTUBE RESEARCH SUMMARY

# Research Summary: H. Pylori and Gastric Terrain

As featured in Dr. Kenny Mittelstadt's video: H. Pylori Wasn't the Beginning of Your Stomach Problems

## Research Context

This week's topic explores how H. pylori infection functions as a signal that the stomach's environment has already been compromised, rather than a standalone diagnosis to be cleared and forgotten. Three key studies connect the dots between gastric terrain, acid regulation, microbiome disruption, and why so many people still feel unwell after successful eradication. Together, they build a case for looking upstream, at the conditions that shaped the gastric environment long before any test confirmed an infection.

## Key Findings from the Research

**STUDY 1 · PMID 35022266**

Ford and colleagues pooled data from 29 randomized controlled trials involving nearly 7,000 patients to examine whether H. pylori eradication improves symptoms of functional dyspepsia. Patients who cleared the organism were more likely to report symptom improvement compared to placebo. The operative word in their findings is improve, not resolve. A meaningful portion of patients who successfully eradicated H. pylori still reported persistent symptoms afterward. This points to the organism as one piece of a larger picture. Clearing it addresses a real factor without automatically repairing the gastric environment that made colonization possible or reversing downstream effects that accumulated while the organism was active.

**STUDY 2 · PMID 37142877**

Kiecka and Szczepanik reviewed evidence on how proton pump inhibitors affect the microbial ecosystem of the digestive tract. Long-term PPI use does more than reduce acid output. It measurably changes the types of microorganisms that can survive and thrive in the gut. Lower stomach acid reduces the hostile barrier that ordinarily prevents certain organisms from establishing, and the researchers found that long-term PPI use is connected to higher rates of bacterial overgrowth and increased vulnerability to certain infections. Stomach acidity is one of the body's primary digestive defense mechanisms, and chronic reduction of it reliably shifts the microbial landscape toward dysbiosis, often years before any formal diagnosis is made.

**STUDY 3 · PMID 36620346**

Koga reviewed research on the gastric microbiome and found that the composition of the stomach's microbial community is directly shaped by stomach acidity. When acid levels are healthy, the environment limits what can survive there, keeping the microbial population small and controlled. When acidity drops, from mucosal changes, medication use, or other causes, organisms that could not previously survive in the stomach can take hold and the entire microbial landscape shifts. This means H. pylori's ability to establish and persist reflects the environment that favors it, and terrain that has shifted toward dysbiosis can shift back when the conditions driving that change are addressed.

## Functional Medicine Connections

The gastric environment is an active system with its own pH regulation, immune surveillance, mucosal defense layer, and microbial community. When that system is functioning well, organisms like H. pylori either cannot establish or remain contained at low levels without causing significant disruption. When the system is under load, from chronic stress, acid suppression, mucosal thinning, or other factors, the terrain shifts. Acid output drops over time, the mucosal barrier thins, the microbial community changes composition, and the resulting environment is one that H. pylori colonizes more easily. Study 3 gives the mechanism, Study 2 shows one of the most common ways that landscape gets disrupted before a diagnosis is ever made, and Study 1 confirms that clearing the organism without addressing the terrain leaves a meaningful number of patients still unwell.

There is also a nervous system layer the research touches on indirectly. Stomach acid production is a rest-and-digest output, running on the branch of the nervous system responsible for repair and digestion. In a chronically stress-dominant physiological state, that system runs quieter over time. Acid output drops gradually, the terrain shifts, and the symptoms that follow, reflux, bloating, heaviness, feel like minor inconveniences. They often get managed with antacids or PPIs rather than investigated further. By the time H. pylori shows up on a test, the conditions that allowed it to establish have often been in place for years. The investigative question is what was happening in that stomach long before the test confirmed it.

## Practical Reflections & Takeaways

Looking back at your symptom history before your H. pylori diagnosis, what were the earliest signs that something was off in your upper digestive tract? How long were those symptoms present before anyone investigated further? That timeline is data worth examining.

If you have already completed H. pylori treatment and still feel unwell, it may be worth asking what the terrain looks like now and which upstream factors might still be shaping your gastric environment. The research suggests persistent symptoms after eradication are common enough to be expected in a meaningful number of cases, and they are a signal worth following rather than a dead end.

## References

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