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How to Deal with Heartburn/Acid Reflux and GERD

Understanding Heartburn

The mistaken belief about heartburn and GERD is that it is caused by too much acid.....

In fact, it is generally caused by NOT ENOUGH ACID. Sorry I shouted that but it is absolutely key to understand this.

But you feel a burning pain in your chest right? It must be too much acid....

First Things First – What is Heartburn and Gastro-Esophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)?

Heartburn

Your stomach produces hydrochloric acid (HCL) and we need a lot of it to break down and digest food properly. The stomach also produces a protective mucosal layer to protect it from the acid. Heartburn occurs when acid from the stomach travels up into the esophagus. Your esophagus does not have a protective mucosal layer and so the acid burns it. The esophagus lies just in front of the heart, and hence you experience 'heartburn'.

If this happens occasionally, your esophagus can repair itself but if it happens regularly then it becomes a problem.

GERD

GERD is chronic heartburn. This means that it occurs at least a few times per week.

Over time, chronic heartburn can erode the lining of the esophagus and cause a host of problems.

Other symptoms include coughing, asthma-like symptoms, difficulty swallowing, a hoarse voice, continually clearing one's throat and a sour taste in the mouth.

GERD can lead to a condition called Barrett's esophagus, which manifests when the lining of the esophagus becomes permanently damaged through chronic exposure to stomach acid. There are no known drugs or even natural therapies that can reverse it. This permanent scarring can lead to esophageal cancer. However, Barrett's esophagus is still quite rare.

Conventional Treatment

As I said, heartburn and GERD are actually caused by low stomach acid. Unfortunately, treatment for heartburn and GERD reduces stomach acid further, making the problem worse which often leads to more and stronger drugs... Yes, they can free you of acid travelling up your esophagus but at the expense of your long- term health.

Side effects from conventional drugs include:

- nutritional deficiencies
- bone loss (in 2010 the Food and Drug Administration in the US required PPIs – proton pump inhibitors – to carry new warning labels regarding their association with mineral deficiencies and bone fractures. Ref. 9&10),
- further digestive problems
- headaches
- irregular heartbeats
- constipation
- diarrhea
- abdominal pain (since digestion is stopped through a lack of acid)
- blurred vision
- depression
- hepatitis.
- Linked to higher dementia risk (ref: 14,15, 16)

Please look this up for yourself or read the side effects on the information that comes with these drugs.

It's Low Stomach Acid NOT Too Much Stomach Acid

In [Craig Fear's book 'Heartburn and Broth'](#), he tells of a lady who, after attending one of his lectures, wrote him a scathing email telling him how wrong he was to say that heartburn/GERD is caused by low stomach acid.

Two years later, he received an email with the subject line 'I Owe You An Apology'.

Her gastroenterologist had assured her that the science supported his approach. However, she got worse and worse, having to take more and more dugs. She thought back to Craig's lecture, thought about the logic of it and decided to take some acid instead of her 'antacid' medication. It worked and she stopped her medication and took acid instead.

She said that whilst she was originally sceptical of the 'not enough acid' theory, she was now convinced and felt like an addict cured.

What Causes Low Stomach Acid

There are several factors

1. Age

Yes, it's rotten getting older... Everything declines with age: your hormones, your muscle mass, your hearing, your memory and your stomach acid/HCL. This is, of course, fairly common knowledge so the question has to be asked

If heartburn is caused by too much acid, as the doctor will tell you, then why don't younger people experience more heartburn than older people?

But age is not the only factor. A 1996 study in the Journal of Gastroenterology and Hepatology found that elderly people don't automatically experience a decline in digestive function but rather are more susceptible to natural aging factors. (Ref: 1)

So, what are these factors?

2. Diet and Stress

I believe that poor diet and stress depletes the body of nutrients and is responsible for the unnerving rise in cancer, heart disease, autoimmune issues, obesity, type 2 diabetes and compromises the acidity in the stomach. The 4 As – autism, ADHD, allergies and asthma – are also on the rise and it seems each generation today seems to get sicker and sicker at younger and younger ages.

Even people who have a healthy diet are not getting all the necessary nutrients. Whilst you can probably get all your vitamins from a broad healthy diet, you will not be getting all the minerals you need because they are no longer in the soil following 100 years of intensive farming. Please see my article on this website '[Where Have All the Minerals Gone?](#)'.

Stress is another factor and is often blamed for the overproduction of acid. Many people say that they have more heartburn during times of high stress.

However, we need to look closer at how stress affects the body to understand why it may actually contribute to low stomach acid.

There are 2 branches to our autonomic nervous system, autonomic meaning it works involuntarily.

The 2 branches are the parasympathetic and the sympathetic nervous systems. They work in opposition to each other i.e. when one is working the other is at rest.

Parasympathetic system is responsible for bodily activities that require a state of rest

Sympathetic system is responsible for the stress response, commonly associated with the fight or flight response.

Digestion is a Parasympathetic Activity

This means that we need to be in a restful state for good digestion as a restful state brings more blood and oxygen to the internal organs.

The stress response signals the body to do the opposite and to bring blood and oxygen to our muscles and away from our internal organs. We breathe harder, our heart pumps harder as the body prepares to run from a dangerous situation or to fight.

Research confirms that stress has a wide range of both short and long-term negative effects on gastric function and can lead to an assortment of digestive problems, including heartburn and GERD. (Ref: 2)

In fact, we know that chronic stress degrades the functioning of every system in our body, not only digestion but also hormone production, mental function and is linked to atherosclerosis to name but a few.

When we are continually stressed, we become depleted, tired and worn out. We come home exhausted and hungry and tend to overeat, often quick/easy/processed unhealthy food or drink too much alcohol or sugary drinks too numb the stress. Over time, our digestion weakens, the gut is damaged and digestive and other health issues arise. (Ref: 3&4)

3. Heartburn Medication

As mentioned above, heartburn medication such as PPIs (proton pump inhibitors) eg omeprazole, esomeprazole, lansoprazole etc. block the production of stomach acid.

Other Factors that can cause Low Stomach Acid

4. Helicobacter Pylori (H. Pylori)

H. Pylori is a type of bacteria which survives in the stomach by secreting an enzyme that neutralises stomach acid.

The Mayo Clinic states that H Pylori infection may be present in over half of the world's population. Infection often happens during childhood, but can also happen at any time. It is caught through direct contact with saliva, vomit or stool or through contaminated food or water. However, many people never experience any symptoms. (Ref: 5)

This is most likely because strong stomach acid can keep H Pylori in check.

Having low stomach acid or taking heartburn/GERD medication that reduces stomach acid means you are either more likely to get H.Pylori or that if it is already present in the stomach, it will be able to flourish.

5. Thyroid Issues

Low stomach acid is common in both hypothyroidism and hyperthyroidism. Stomach acid is needed for the absorption of the thyroid medication, l-thyroxine.

6. Autoimmune Gastritis

An autoimmune disease where the immune system destroys the acid producing cells in the stomach called parietal cells⁵. This can also lead to vitamin B12 deficiency, or pernicious anaemia.

What Happens When We Have Low Stomach Acid

The stomach is a warm, moist environment. Fermentation is the process by which sugars get broken down and produces gas as a byproduct. Fermentation likes warmth and moisture, which makes it happen more quickly and efficiently.

In the presence of low stomach acid, the sugars in carbohydrates can ferment in the warm, moist environment and lead to the production of excess gas. Bloating, belching and bad breath are some of the symptoms that result.

Maldigested food and the resulting gas builds up in the stomach and can start to put pressure on the lower esophageal sphincter (LES), the valve that keeps the stomach separate from the esophagus. Over time, the LES can weaken through this continuous increased pressure and

factors such as alcohol use, smoking, caffeine, pregnancy, certain medications like nitrates, and calcium channel blockers. (Ref: 3)

When there is low stomach acid, there is not sufficient acid to extract the minerals from the food we eat. Hence, we become mineral deficient. This is why the long-term use of heartburn/GERD medication can lead to bone fractures/osteoporosis and other health problems. (Ref. 9&10)

Treatment

1. If you have Helicobacter Pylori, which is also now known to cause peptic ulcers, both can be cured through drinking cabbage juice for about 30 days. Dr Garrett Cheney conducted a double-blind control trial at the San Quentin prison in the US on patients who had a diagnosed ulcer crater. Results indicated cabbage juice as an effective treatment. Symptoms were relieved quickly – between 7 and 10 days. (ref: 4,5,6). This treatment should be combined with a bland, cooked diet and plenty of rest. For more information on the cabbage juice protocol, [click here](#).
2. Whilst treating heartburn and GERD, avoid foods that trigger symptoms and cooked food will be better than raw. Interestingly, a 1998 study in the British Medical Journal *Gut* found that fatty foods do not influence heartburn when calories are not overconsumed i.e. eating too much may be the key here. (Ref. 8)
3. The first thing to try for acid reflux is taking Apple Cider Vinegar. However, if you have a stomach/peptic ulcer or helicobacter pylori you must heal these first. You could also try using bone broths instead (see below).

I was recently working with a young man helping him to heal his gut. All his symptoms and digestion improved. He already had a healthy diet, made bone broths but he still had acid reflux. I suggested taking apple cider vinegar before a meal and this has done the trick.

He started by taking 1 tablespoon of Apple Cider Vinegar mixed with 1 tablespoon of water twice a day and drunk through a metal straw to avoid damaging the enamel on his teeth.

After a few months, he now does not need to take it every day and does not take it when going out for dinner or on business trips/travelling.

Here is a You Tube video on healing chronic acid reflux with apple cider vinegar. There are 3 posts – First 30 Days, After 6 Months and After a Year. This man had had terrible acid reflux for about 15 years. He went from taking the tonic twice a day to about twice a week after a year. The videos are about 12-15 mins long.

<https://youtu.be/JkJu9OAJ8l4?si=PThvKoPmsLzRYgLb>

<https://youtu.be/E4WJ4aN896g?si=6H4We9kLrgjvUtmt>

<https://youtu.be/2OfIqRgk8N4?si=0pXf3lQsMnVNP6LT>

If you choose to try apple cider vinegar, you need to stop taking your reflux medication. Apple cider vinegar increases acid in the stomach but reflux medication reduces acid in the stomach so the 2 would cancel each other out.

4. Craig Fear, a certified Nutritional Therapist Practitioner, has treated many people with heartburn/Gerd, gut related issues and he swears by bone broth. Bone broth contains many nutrients that are healing to the gut including minerals, collagen, glucosamine and chondroitin sulfates, which are sold as supplements.

Collagen contains gelatin which is known for its numerous health benefits, particularly its ability to ease gastrointestinal discomfort. It also acts as an anti-inflammatory on the gastrointestinal lining.

Proline and glycine, the 2 main amino acids in gelatin, have a profound healing and protective effect.

Hence, gelatin will nourish and repair the delicate mucosal lining and help reverse leaky gut. This will prevent the damaging effects of harder to digest foods and the resulting buildup of bad bacteria – which contributes to dysbiosis (an imbalance in the gut microbial community associated with disease) and the production of excess gas and pressure.

Conclusion

When we have believed something that we have been told for a long time to be true, it can be difficult to accept that it may not be true and especially that the opposite is true.

But for heartburn and Gerd, it seems this is the case and once the logic is explained, it makes sense.

My friend's son, whom I have been helping with digestion issues, has proven the point. Apple cider vinegar has alleviated his heartburn. No need for drugs.

I urge you to give this approach some serious thought and give it a try (although if you have a stomach ulcer, you need to heal that first (see above)).

I hope this information provides you with relief from heartburn and Gerd and enables you to live again with a Zest For Life.

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