The shocking truth about reflux and antacids

www.liverdoctor.com/the-shocking-truth-about-reflux-and-antacids/

victoriah

Did you know that the vast majority of people who suffer reflux and heartburn actually don't produce enough acid in their stomach, and antacids make the problem worse?

Too much stomach acid is a very rare condition. Too little stomach acid is called hypochlorhydria and it affects more than 50 percent of people over the age of 40.
Low stomach acid can produce a lot of the same symptoms as high stomach acid, helping to explain why antacids are so frequently used.

Long term use of antacids can do enormous harm to your health.

What are the symptoms of insufficient stomach acid?

Each of the symptoms below may give you clues that your stomach is not producing enough acid:

- Abdominal bloating after meals
- Feeling tired after meals
- Reflux and heartburn
- Weak nails
- Ridges on the nails
- Weak and thinning scalp hair
- Red cheeks
- Burping and passing gas
- Bad breath
- Eczema and acne

Antacid medication does provide relief from heartburn and reflux but it can worsen all the other symptoms. By lowering the amount of acid in your stomach, they can put you at risk of stomach and intestinal infections, raising your risk of food poisoning and gastroenteritis (stomach flu).

Your stomach produces hydrochloric acid as soon as some food enters it. The acid specifically helps to digest protein rich foods, by activating protein digesting enzymes called proteases. Therefore people with low stomach acid typically experience bloating and indigestion after eating foods like red meat, oily fish, eggs and poultry.

It is normal for the level of acid in your stomach to decline as you get older. Interestingly, many elderly people stop eating red meat because they say it gives them indigestion. It is wise to avoid eating foods you know upset your digestion, but there are ways to treat the cause of the problem and boost your stomach acid.

You also need sufficient stomach acid in order to absorb vitamins and minerals properly. Vitamin B12, zinc, calcium, iron and magnesium in particular require high levels of stomach acid for their absorption. This explains why people with hypochlorhydria typically experience health problems such as fatigue, low mood, weak nails and scalp hair loss. These are symptoms of malabsorption.

The other main purpose of stomach acid is to provide a disinfectant action. A strong acid is a good way of killing

harmful bugs that you may have accidentally swallowed while eating. People with low stomach acid are very prone to getting food poisoning or just feeling a bit off after eating out. They are also more prone to catching parasitic infections in their digestive tract.

Why are antacids given to people with low stomach acid?

The interesting thing is that in the vast majority of cases, people with heartburn and reflux do not make too much stomach acid; the acid is just in the wrong location, causing burning and irritation to the esophagus (food pipe) and throat. The esophagus transports food to your stomach after you've swallowed it. There is a valve at the end of the esophagus, controlling the entry of food to the stomach. This valve is known as the esophageal sphincter, cardiac sphincter or gastro-esophageal sphincter (all names for the same thing).

Once food has entered your stomach and your stomach has secreted some acid, the sphincter tightens, helping to prevent food and acid from traveling in the wrong direction, back up the esophagus. The stomach contents need to be at a sufficiently low pH (meaning very acidic) in order to keep that valve closed tightly. If there is not enough acid in the stomach (as occurs in people with hypochlorhydria), the valve becomes more loose and allows acid and stomach contents to travel upwards and cause the symptoms of acid reflux or heartburn. If there is too much bad bacteria in the stomach and intestines, they release gases which travel upwards and compromise the integrity of the eophageal sphincter.

Giving the patient an antacid does control those symptoms, by severely blocking acid production, but it is not addressing the source of the problem.

What causes low stomach acid?

Low stomach acid is an incredibly common problem and there are several factors responsible:

- Stress, anxiety and tension are your digestive system's worst enemies. If you eat while in an emotional state, you will not be making enough stomach acid or digestive enzymes.
- Food allergy, intolerance or sensitivity. The irony is that low stomach acid makes you more likely to develop a food allergy, and having a food allergy can inhibit normal acid production. It is very important to identify and remove problematic foods. Gluten and dairy products are a common culprit but there could be others. Our book The Ultimate Detox contains a gluten and dairy free eating plan.
- Mineral deficiencies. Zinc and sodium are required for hydrochloric acid production. Zinc deficiencies are very common, especially among vegetarians. Sodium deficiency is not common; it can occur in athletes or people who have experienced diarrhea or vomiting.
- High sugar diets.
- Inflammation of the lining of the stomach, known as gastritis can inhibit acid secretion.
- Food allergy, autoimmune disease and infection with the bacteria Helicobacter pylori can all result in gastritis.

What to do about hypochlorhydria

The most important initial strategy is to take a hydrochloric acid supplement. This is known as betaine hydrochloride and is available in capsule form combined with digestive enzymes, known as Super Digestive Enzymes. People who don't make enough stomach acid generally don't produce enough digestive enzymes either. Taking a supplement will help you absorb more goodness from the food you eat, and in this way help to correct the symptoms of hypochlorhydria listed above. This supplement is particularly good for strengthening the hair and nails.

Other recommendations

- **Make sure you obtain plenty of zinc in your diet.** Zinc is found predominantly in seafood, eggs, poultry

and red meat. Nuts and seeds contain some zinc, but the phytic acid in these foods impairs its absorption.

- **Increase your consumption of bitter foods.** When your taste buds register a bitter taste, signals travel along your vagus nerve that stimulate your stomach to secrete acid. It's a good idea to nibble on something bitter tasting at the beginning of a meal, to trigger acid production. Examples of bitter foods include radicchio lettuce, endive, chicory and bitter melon.
- **Include natural acids in your diet.** These include vinegar, lemon and lime juice. It is a good idea to put a tablespoon of apple cider vinegar in a quarter of a mug of warm water and sip it before a meal.
- **Glutamine is healing and soothing** to the entire lining of the digestive system. It offers wonderful symptomatic relief for burning and irritation.
- **Give your digestive system a rest.** Sometimes acid production is inhibited by rushed eating and over eating. Try having a day every so often where you only consume raw vegetable juice. The nutrients in raw juices are extremely easy to absorb because the tough cell walls of the vegetables have been broken down. Cabbage is particularly soothing to an inflamed stomach. Try making juice from a combination of raw cabbage, celery, carrot, parsley and pear. There are more recipe ideas in my book Raw Juices Can Save Your Life. If you are a diabetic please do not undertake a juice fast.

A word of caution

Antacids do have a role to play in managing severe heartburn or reflux. If allowed to continue, these conditions can cause inflammation of the lining of the esophagus, and that is a risk factor for esophageal cancer. Sometimes antacids are necessary, but in general they are very over prescribed and only mask symptoms; they do not address the underlying digestive disorder. Please consult with your doctor before discontinuing any medication.

The above statements have not been evaluated by the FDA and are not intended to diagnose, treat or cure any disease.

You May Be Interested In:

1. Reflux
2. Natural Solutions for GERD (Gastro Esophageal Reflux Disease)
3. Heartburn drugs can double the risk of kidney failure in older people
4. Do you produce enough stomach acid?
5. Gastro-Esophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)