

#17 HEARTBURN AND THE ANTACID MYTH

by Carol Watson, R.N., N.D.

The American College of Gastroenterology says that over 50 million Americans are suffering from irritable bowel syndrome (IBS- which is second only to the common cold as a cause of absenteeism from work), 20 million have stomach ulcers, and 60 million suffer from heartburn. Researchers at the Karolinska Institute in Sweden report in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (3/18/99) that if left untreated, chronic heartburn increases the risk of esophageal cancer eightfold (another source stated that people with heartburn have a 43% higher risk of developing esophageal cancer). Why? Heartburn occurs when the stomach acid "refluxes" or splashes back into the esophagus. Research suggests that acid irritates the esophagus and may lead to precancerous changes that can progress to cancer. Simple changes in diet and lifestyle and safe natural remedies can easily provide relief of these symptoms.

However, the January 8, 2001 issue of Business Week mentions that Prilosec is the top selling prescription drug in the world. It earns Astra Zeneca (the drug's maker), 6 billion dollars per year. The drug, and others like it, clearly are effective at what they do or there is no way in the world these companies could convince people to buy them. BUT they do NOT solve the problem. In fact, they actually worsen it.

Then, when you are using the wrong solution for the problem, you are bound to have problems. Drugs are rarely, if ever, indicated for the common ulcer and associated stomach problems. The proton pump inhibitors like Prevacid and Prilosec and the H2 blocker agents like Tagamet, Pepcid, and Zantac are some of the worst drugs that you could possibly take. Why? They significantly reduce the amount of acid you have and with that your ability to properly digest food. Reduction of acid in the stomach also diminishes your primary defense mechanism for food borne infections and will increase your risk of food poisoning. Our bodies were not designed to have their acid level suppressed. If that occurs then the enzymes we need to digest our food are not activated, and we will have an inability to fully utilize the food we eat.

Allow me to explain what I call the "antacid myth" to help drive home my point. Many people think they have too much stomach acid and take over-the-counter antacids and even the more powerful prescription drugs above. In reality, their digestive *problems stem from low stomach acid, very few digestive enzymes and huge meals that were not chewed thoroughly enough, all causing food to sit in the digestive tract longer than it should. When food is not digested properly, it ferments, causing gas and bloating. As the gases rise, they distend the esophagus, which causes the pain in the chest that some say feels like a heart attack. Too much gas causes the valve that keeps the stomach contents out of the esophagus to stretch, spilling the contents of the stomach, acid and all, into the esophagus, causing the stinging pain of heartburn. Taking an antacid may temporarily quell that burning feeling, but it also reduces stomach acid, again causing improper digestion of food, which ferments and starts the whole problem all over again. When we try and control stomach acid with antacid medications, the stomach compensates by providing more acid.* Antacids also deplete potassium, calcium and phosphorus from the body. If you have osteoporosis, or at risk, you should NOT take antacids.

I would also like to explain the importance of enzymes in our diets to aid in digestion. Enzymes occur naturally in foods, so raw foods contain the enzymes necessary to break food down so the body can use it. However, enzymes are destroyed at temperatures of 118 degrees or above. This means that most of the important nutrients are destroyed with cooking. What happens when we eat cooked foods that are devoid of enzymes? Fortunately, we have somewhat of a backup system that we are born with and we can draw from in order to accomplish the task of digestion. However, that supply is limited. Like a bank account, our enzyme supply will eventually run dry if we continue to draw from it without making deposits. Signs of indigestion, such as bloating, flatulence, burping and other unpleasant symptoms like constipation and food allergies are all indications that your supply of digestive enzymes is being compromised. As digestive enzymes are exhausted, more serious health concerns can occur.

Dr. Edward Howell, who spent over 40 years studying the effects of enzymes on health said, "Humans eating an enzymeless diet use up a tremendous amount of their enzyme potential....The result is shortened life span, illness and lowered resistance to stress of all types, psychological and environmental."

Knowing how difficult it is for the body to contend with cooked and processed foods helps us understand why enzyme deficiency is a major cause of disease and degeneration. Is it any wonder that digestive disorders have been linked to 13 percent of hospital admissions today?

Let's discuss some natural remedies to our enzyme-deficiency leading to heartburn, indigestion, ulcers...etc: (for acute symptoms, at the first sign of heartburn, try drinking a large glass of water, this often helps):

--SLOW DOWN! Chew your food thoroughly to allow your saliva to start the digestive process and don't drink lots of fluid with your meals (this dilutes your digestive enzymes and makes your system work even harder at production of enzymes, thus depleting your enzyme "bank" even further). Limit your fluids to 4 ounces of pure water if you must drink.

--Eat small meals! Big meals are very difficult to digest. Eating small meals throughout the day will not only help heal stomach problems, but keep your blood sugar in a healthy range. Sit, relax and enjoy your food. Remember that digestion starts in the mouth.

--Make sure you are getting an adequate amount of enzymes in your diet from raw foods! Eat 7-13 half-cup servings of organic fruits and vegetables every day. If you don't, won't, or can't, PLEASE do consider the Juice Plus+ that I have been mentioning in just about every newsletter. These live enzymes are ESSENTIAL to health and Juice Plus+ is the nutritional essence of 17 fresh, raw herbicide- and pesticide-free fruits and vegetables encapsulated with the enzymes intact (the proprietary juicing process does NOT use heat). I actually have a few customers who won't stop taking their Juice Plus+ because it has "cured" their heartburn and indigestion. The reason that their symptoms are relieved is because their bodies are getting the enzymes that they need to aid in proper digestion AND nutrient assimilation. Juice Plus+ has the digestive enzymes lipase to help digest fats, protease to digest protein, amylase to digest carbohydrates and cellulase to digest fibers. It also has the natural enzymes papain (from papaya) and bromelain (from pineapple) to aid in the digestive process. And, one more naturally occurring component is acidophilus. This is also added to the Juice Plus+ to help replace our "good bacteria" and enhance digestion. So, you see, you really can't lose with Juice Plus+ when it comes to prevention!

--Probiotics! Poor nutritional choices and excessive use of antibiotics have weakened the body's ability to attack and destroy potential disease-causing bacteria, parasites and viruses. Probiotics have been proven to enhance immune function and reduce inflammatory responses of the gut. If you are not allergic to dairy products, then 1/2 cup of acidophilus-rich yogurt every day would definitely help but I personally take and recommend kefir (you can also make your own...explore the internet for options). Again, Juice Plus+ has natural probiotics added to it. Or, if you have been on antibiotics for extended periods of time, then I would suggest a more powerful probiotic for the period of 3 months or so to replace your good bacterial flora. You would need a wide variety of "active" enzymes in the form of L. acidophilus, bifidum, rhamnosus, longum...etc. I personally recommend and use Garden of Life probiotics as they are a whole food based product and have enzymes as well. Start with one month supply of fungal defense; then switch to Primal Defense.....take as directed on bottle.

--Raw potato juice! Do not peel the potato, just wash it and put it in the juicer. Mix the juice with an equal amount of water and drink it immediately after preparation, three times a day. This helps to heal the inflammation, irritation and ulcerations.

--Reduce stress! Intestinal flare-ups, colitis, IBS and excess acid production are often associated with increased stress. There is a definite connection between stress, the immune system and inflammation. Try prayer, mediation, yoga, breathing exercises, a walk in the park....all of which can help reduce the intestinal consequences of stress (as well as overall health).

--Tea and lemon! Get your digestive juices flowing by starting your day with a cup of herbal tea with a teaspoon of fresh-squeezed lemon juice fifteen minutes before your breakfast. Use herbal teas, as coffee aggravates your gut problems. Drink peppermint, fennel or ginger tea to soothe a troubled tummy. Or, you could try sipping 1 tablespoon of raw apple cider vinegar, mixed with 4 ounces of water while eating a meal. Do not drink any other liquids with meals.

--Garlic is one food that you should be eating every day. I am very impressed with its ability to optimize bowel flora and kill pathogenic organisms such as H. pylori. It is important to note that the garlic MUST be fresh. The active ingredient is destroyed within several hours of smashing the garlic. Garlic pills are virtually worthless and should not be used. When you use the garlic it will be important to compress the garlic with a spoon prior to swallowing it if you are not going to juice it. If you swallow the clove intact you will not convert the allicin to its active ingredient. One problem, of course, is the smell, but generally a few cloves a day are tolerated by most people. If one develops a "socially offensive" odor then all you do is slightly decrease the volume of garlic until there is no odor present.

--No refined sugar or "fake" sugar! Try the herbal sweetener Stevia found at your health food store. Sorbitol and other artificial sweeteners can create gas, bloating and increased diarrhea. White sugar has been found to reduce the activity of immune cells that fight bacteria, viruses, parasites and cancer. As little as one teaspoon of white sugar inactivates these important immune cells for up to six hours.

--Fabulous fiber! Combat constipation and control diarrhea with increased fiber. Again, Juice Plus+ capsules contain a good food source of fiber, as well as, ground flax seeds (also you will get your heart healthy omega-3 essential oils), psyllium, guar gum or pectin. Juice Plus+ also has two other nutritional supplements that provide good sources of fiber. If you are not getting 30-40 Grams of fiber in your diet every day to help keep a health colon and reduce your cholesterol, ask me about these tasty whole food supplements (Complete meal replacement powder and Fiber wafers).

--Water! Drink at least 8-10 glasses of pure water every day.

--No NSAIDS! Using non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs increases your risk of upper gastrointestinal ulcers, bleeding and digestive difficulties. I used to work in the endoscopy/colonoscopy department of our local hospital on a part-time basis and I can tell you that I personally saw the effects of these NSAIDS and arthritis medications like Celebrex and Vioxx on a daily basis! Countless patients have been told that they have esophagitis, gastritis or worse yet, ulcers, as a result of these drugs! I might also add that I have the unfortunate experience of witnessing many patients told that they have colon cancer. Just as the statistics for colon cancer are rising in the United States, so I am witnessing more and more people told that they have some form of esophageal or colon cancer.....we can help prevent these diseases if we would just do some of the above suggestions. Won't you please consider making some dietary and lifestyle changes for the benefit of your health?

I hesitate to give you my supplemental recommendations, at the risk of you then not trying to make the above changes FIRST. However, for those of you who absolutely will not do any of the above, then for the sake of keeping you off prescription drugs, here are a few supplements that I would recommend. I am not going to give you doses....follow guidelines and suggestions on the bottle.

- Deglycyrrhizinated licorice can help bring quick relief and may help heal damaged mucus lining in the stomach. Make sure you get the deglycyrrhizinated form of licorice, as the glycyrrhizin component that causes high blood pressure has been removed.
- Aloe vera juice is another fast-acting supplement that frequently helps soothe an agitated esophagus.
- Gamma-oryzanol, also known as rice bran oil, may be especially appropriate for those who have chronic reflux.
- Choline, pantothenic acid, thiamin and B12. These are all B-complex vitamins that can have long-term digestive benefits. If you suffer from chronic heartburn, try them in combination for a couple months to see if they help.
- Digestive enzymes like pancreatin, bromelain, papaya. I recommend Wobenzym (www.wobenzym.com).

Call your doctor if...

- You have frequent episodes not relieved by the above measures.
- You have trouble swallowing or food lodges in your throat.
- You experience nausea or vomiting or pass black stools.
- You have crushing chest pain that spreads to the neck or left arm, as well as dizziness, shortness of breath, sweating, or rapid heartbeat. If you are suffering from any of these symptoms, get to the hospital immediately; you may be having a heart attack.

DISCLAIMER: This information is not meant to diagnose, prescribe for or treat any disease. It is a tool that is offered to assist the individual in making educated choices about his/her personal health and lifestyle. No health claims are made for any product or formula mentioned herein.

Improving Health Naturally,
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