

Are Antacids the Best Way to Treat Heartburn and GERD?

By Toni Eatros, MS, Dipl Ac, AP

If you walk into any pharmacy or grocery store, you will see rows and rows of antacid medications developed by Big Pharma to reduce the production of stomach acid. They have us convinced that stomach acid is evil and that we must stop its production. What they don't tell you is that a prolonged deficiency of stomach acid can lead to a multitude of digestive issues and a decreased ability to absorb and utilize certain vitamins and minerals, ultimately leading to a decline in overall health. All health starts in the digestive tract. If this is compromised over the long term, chronic illness will inevitably arise.

What is Heartburn? The burning sensation in your chest is a signal from the body that something in the digestive tract is not working properly. Many times, this pain is a signal that the sphincter between the esophagus (the tube where food passes between your throat and stomach) and the stomach is not functioning correctly. It is the job of this sphincter to keep the stomach contents from regurgitating up and burning the lining of the esophageal wall. The number one reason for this regurgitation is too much belly fat. This fat compresses the sphincter, weakening it over time. It has nothing to do with too much acid, so taking an antacid will not address the root cause of the problem. Acupuncture can be very helpful in strengthening this sphincter and assisting with weight loss if indicated. Alcohol, tobacco and some foods can also be causes of heartburn.

GERD When the stomach acid frequently goes up into the esophagus, the diagnosis is gastroesophageal reflux disease. This is a serious condition. Not only is it painful, it can lead to a pre-cancerous condition called

Barrett's esophagus. The risk of esophageal cancer increases by 30-50 times when Barrett's esophagus is present.

The stomach is designed to maintain an extremely acidic environment (pH 1-3). This acidic environment is essential for the proper digestion of food and the assimilation of nutrients. Digestive and chronic health problems begin to develop when the pH starts to rise above 3.0.

If the pH in the stomach begins to rise, a feedback mechanism causes gastrin levels in the body to rise and stimulate the production of more hydrochloric acid in the stomach. The long term use of proton pump inhibitor medications (Nexium and Prilosec) can result in irreversible achlorhydria, a condition where the pH of the stomach cannot fall below 4. The use of these products will cause elevated levels of gastrin in the body. Elevated gastrin levels have been shown to increase the risk of developing stomach and colon cancers. Bacterial, yeast and parasitic overgrowth also occur when stomach pH is too high.

What are the effects of using these medications long term?

No one really knows. Based on the physiology, it probably is not a good idea to reduce the amount of stomach acid, thereby increasing the pH of the stomach, for the long term. When used for longer than 4 weeks, proton pump inhibitors will likely lead to chronic illness. These medications ensure multiple nutritional deficiencies.

Conditions Associated with Not Enough Stomach Acid from taking Antacid Medication:

- Allergies
- Asthma
- Eczema
- Acne
- Hives
- Gallbladder Disorders including Stones and Infection
- Migraine Headaches
- Vitamin B-12 Deficiency
- Autoimmune Diseases including Lupus, Rheumatoid Arthritis, Graves' Disease and Hashimoto's Disease
- Bacterial Overgrowth in the Digestive Tracts causing IBS, Ulcerative Colitis and Crohn's Disease
- H. Pylori Infection
- C. Difficile Infection causing Prolonged and Persistent Diarrhea
- Candida Infections
- Iron, Zinc, Copper, and Calcium Deficiencies

It is far more common for a person to have too little stomach acid, than too much stomach acid. If you are prescribed an acid blocker medication, ask to have your gastric pH level checked prior to starting the medication. Stomach acid levels can be measured directly via a Heidelberg Test or indirectly by a comprehensive stool digestive analysis.

Why take a medication for the long term that can have so many far reaching side effects? There are safe and effective natural therapies to treat heartburn and GERD, including acupuncture, herbs, and some simple lifestyle changes.

For further information on the importance of adequate amounts of stomach acid read *Why Stomach Acid is Good For You* by Jonathan Wright, MD and *Drugs That Don't Work and Natural Therapies That Do!* by David Brownstein, MD. If you would like guidance and support discontinuing the regular use of your antacid medication call 239-260-4566, or schedule online at www.AcupunctureSolutionsOnline.com, and we can customize a treatment plan specific to you.

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