

THE TRUTH ABOUT HEARTBURN

MYTH: HEARTBURN AND GERD ARE A PRODUCT OF TOO MUCH STOMACH ACID

This is a widely accepted myth that's completely untrue. In fact, the opposite is true: heartburn and GERD is often caused by too little stomach acid. *Huh?! Let me explain.*

IT'S ACTUALLY ABOUT NOT HAVING *ENOUGH* STOMACH ACID

Lower Esophageal Valve (LEV) dysfunction can also be the cause of heartburn. The LEV is muscular valve that separates the lower end of the esophagus and stomach. It should only ever open when you're swallowing liquids or food or burping. Otherwise it should remain shut in order to prevent the contents of the stomach passing back up the esophagus. When the LEV malfunctions, stomach acid swishes back up the esophagus and causes heartburn. It doesn't matter how much acid is in the stomach - a lot or a little - if the LEV is malfunctioning acid will go the wrong way and cause heartburn. The reason it hurts so much is because the esophagus doesn't have a lining to protect it from this acid, unlike the stomach does. Unfortunately, frequent heartburn can also be a factor in esophageal cancer, so it's something you really want to pay attention to and fix.

So what leads to LEV dysfunction? An increase in intra-abdominal pressure or stomach bloating. What causes this bloating? All too often it's caused by low stomach acid. What? **LOW** stomach acid causes heartburn? Yes. This is because having too little stomach acid leads to bacterial overgrowth in the small intestines (also called SIBO: Small Intestinal Bacterial Overgrowth). The stomach is not supposed to be an alkaline environment. We're supposed to have stomach *acid* in order to kill off certain "bad" bacteria. When this "bad" bacteria is able to flourish this leads to poor food digestion of food and hence, gas. These microbes can also give off volatile fatty acids and gasses themselves. It's this gas that leads to intra-abdominal pressure and thus, LEV dysfunction and heartburn. There are other things that can lead to heartburn as well such as obesity, pregnancy, spicy or fatty foods, overeating or hiatal hernia.

TAKING ANTACIDS ONLY MASK THE *REAL* ISSUE AND CAN ACTUALLY BE VERY HARMFUL

Hopefully by now you can see that suppressing stomach acid with antacids doesn't treat the cause of the problem; it only treats the symptom - and it can actually make things worse. The more potent group of antacids are called proton-pump inhibitors and these can lead to an increased risk of osteoporosis, heart arrhythmias, intestinal infections, bacterial pneumonia and many nutrient deficiencies. Additionally, they can increase the risk of various gastrointestinal cancers.

A FEW THINGS YOU CAN TRY INSTEAD

Instead of taking harmful antacids, try some of these natural alternatives instead:

- Take a digestive enzyme including HCl to aid digestion.
- Take some bitters before each main meal. Bitters are a fabulous way in which you can stimulate your gastric juices in order to aid digestion. Some great bitters include: barberry bark, caraway, dandelion, fennel, gentian root, ginger, globe artichoke, goldenseal root, hops, milk thistle, peppermint, wormwood and yellow dock. Taking apple cider vinegar or some lemon juice before a main meal can also stimulate gastric juices.
- Eat fermented foods to restore and rebalance beneficial bacterial levels.
- Increase healing fats such as coconut oil to reduce inflammation and further support digestion.
- Take a probiotic daily.
- Do not consume liquids whilst eating your meals as this will decrease gastric juices further.
- Take deglycyrrhizinated licorice (DGL) to heal the esophagus and to restore the gut lining. Other options include bone broth and gelatin, and you must reduce stress in order to heal the gut.
- If you've been taking antacids for a prolonged period of time, I suggest getting some nutrient tests because stomach acid is required for the absorption of some nutrients. The ones I suggest testing and then supplementing if your levels are low include: B12, folic acid, calcium, iron and zinc.

** Always check with your doctor first before taking any new supplements, especially if you have a medical condition or are currently taking medication **

