



Effects of Antacid Medications

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According to the National Institute of Health, approximately 25 million Americans are suffering from heartburn each year. With such a large number of the population afflicted with this painful and potentially dangerous health problem, chances are that you are represented in this statistic. Over the past decade pharmaceutical companies have lead us to believe that the cause of this heartburn epidemic is an overproduction of stomach acid and doctors are writing millions of "acid blocker" prescriptions each year aimed at easing the symptoms of [acid reflux](#). Ironically however, low stomach acid levels, not excessive levels, may very well be causing your [heartburn](#). And further more, the very act of "blocking" your stomach acid production can have disastrous consequences for your health down the road.

Acid reflux is often incorrectly thought of as a stomach acid disease, but actually it is the result of a malfunctioning muscle called the lower esophageal sphincter (LES). The LES is a flap that separates the base of the [esophagus](#) from the top of the stomach and opens only to allow food and liquids to pass down or vomit or gas to pass up. When the LES is functioning properly it will remain closed at all other times, sealing off the esophagus from the harmful acids in the stomach. When the LES is malfunctioning however, the corrosive stomach acids are able to make their way into the esophagus where they burn the esophageal lining. Over time this can lead to ulcers, swelling and even cancer. Many things can lead to LES malfunction: the consumption of nicotine, caffeine, chocolate, certain drugs, eating large meals, obesity, hernia (hiatal), alcohol, [food allergies](#) and low stomach acid.

It may be hard for you to move away from the popular misconception that an overproduction of stomach acid is causing your heartburn. After all, it's been drilled into our heads for years and all of the medications available to treat acid reflux work by either neutralizing or blocking the offending acids. But consider this: As we age our stomach acid levels decline. When we are in our [teens](#) these levels are at their very highest, around 175mg/hr. However, by the time we hit our 30's the levels have declined to an average of 100 mg/hr and once we've hit our 60's the levels are as low as 50 mg/hr. Yet, do you recall having heartburn in your teens or early 20's?

When I explain the real culprit of heartburn to my patients I often hear the same question: "Since I've started taking an acid blocker I've had relatively no heartburn but that doesn't make sense based on what you've told me. How can you explain this?" The answer is, when you block the production of stomach acid there isn't any acid to reflux into the esophagus. So, while the cause of heartburn isn't an overproduction of acid, by shutting off (or slowing down) acid production you are minimizing the chance that the acid can harm the esophagus. However, this does nothing for the initial problem of the malfunctioning LES. Should you cease taking the acid blocking [medication](#), your heartburn will return almost immediately.

I go on to explain to the patient that, while their medication may be working temporarily, the damage that it's causing to their body can be extremely dangerous over the long term. Stomach acid plays an important role in both [digestion](#) and our overall health and by blocking its production we are essentially starving the body of life sustaining nutrients.

Stomach acid is absolutely vital to digestion, breaking down valuable nutrients in our food so that they can be more easily absorbed into the bloodstream. These nutrients, such as amino acids, minerals and vitamins, are necessary to power the cells in our body. Without an adequate amount of nutrients the cells will not function properly.

Once the food has been broken down in the stomach it passes into the small intestines where it triggers the secretion of [hormones](#) that are necessary to continue the digestive process. The same acid that broke down the food in the stomach is a key component to triggering these hormones. If there is not enough acid present in the food once it's made its way to the small intestines, these hormones will not be triggered and the digestive process will not be successful. The overall effect of low stomach acid production is the ultimate starvation of your body.

Just as stomach acid is vital to digestion, it is also a powerful protector of your entire GI tract. Inside the various organs of the GI tract reside [bacteria](#) that is harmful to the stomach but necessary to the organ that it lives in. When proper acid levels are present the bacteria cannot survive in the stomach, but if acid levels are too low then this harmful bacteria can thrive. If the bacteria spread it can excrete toxic substances into the entire body. Taking a digestive enzyme after meals may be the key as well.

Research has shown that over time low stomach acid can lead to a wide range of serious diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, type 1 diabetes, osteoporosis, rheumatoid arthritis, asthma, [allergies](#), skin disorders, and depression.

The good news is that acid reflux can be treated naturally and safely by getting to the root of the cause. When a patient comes to me complaining of heartburn, the first thing that I do is an extensive background to find out what might be causing their LES to malfunction. When a patient has a heavy feeling in their chest after eating, or heartburn a few hours after eating or acid reflux it becomes clear. So many times I find that food allergies play a factor in the problem and by simply eliminating those foods from their normal eating plan we can correct the problem. As there might be multiple causes for the problem, the solution will often involve a combination of nutritional supplements to get the patient back on track.

Once we have developed a treatment plan, weaning the patient of their prescription acid-blocker becomes key to a full recovery. I generally recommend that the patient begin by decreasing their medication to every other day during the first week, then down to only twice a week in the second week, once a week in the third and finally stopping the medication completely in week four. During this time I place the patient on an all-natural supplement designed specifically to treat the effects of heartburn and indigestion called perfectlyhealthy Heartburn Ease™. This is a proprietary blend with ingredients that include L-Glutamine, Aloe Vera Leaf, deglycerized Licorice Root, Bismuth Citrate, Slippery Elm Bark, Okra Leaf and Fenugreek Seed. Patients should take 2 perfectlyhealthy Heartburn Ease™ capsules in between each meal and 2 to 3 more directly before bedtime. Once the malfunctioning LES has been corrected, acid reflux will subside and this supplement can be taken, only when needed, or at bedtime.

As a nation we find it so simple to pop a pill to "cure" what ails us, but in this case the pill might be causing more harm than good. And the "cure" is not a cure at all but a temporary solution that is merely prolonging the problem rather than fixing it for good. You owe it to yourself to make intelligent and informed decisions about what you put into your body and how you address your health problems. If you suffer from acid reflux, seek out a doctor who is willing to treat the root cause of the problem. Decide on good health today!