



"Primary Care Naturally"

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Stomach Acid: Friend or Foe?

By Dr. Olivia Franks, ND

Do you or someone you know take an acid blocker to help with heartburn? Ever wonder if taking that acid blocking drug for years and years is good for you? Your doctor probably didn't tell you that taking the acid blocking drugs – like Nexium, Prevacid, and Protonix – causes increased risk of osteoporosis, anemia and malnutrition, among several others issues and are not meant to be used for more than 8 weeks!

Without stomach acid your symptoms of heartburn are *temporarily improved* but your digestion and absorption of nutrients is left impaired. Your body then can't absorb important minerals like: calcium, B12, iron, magnesium, selenium, zinc, B1, B6, vitamins A and E. That's a long list! And I see this almost every day in my practice, men with anemia – typically a women's illness - due to poor iron absorption, fatigue and neurological issues due to poor B12 absorption, and even more common – osteoporosis. More serious side –effects of long-term acid-blocker use is increased risk of stomach, pancreatic and esophageal cancers. With cancer quickly taking the lead as number one killer, who needs more risk of that?

That's not all, I'm sorry to say! Stomach acid also helps to sterilize stomach contents so that bacteria, yeast and fungi - coming in from food you've ingested – doesn't infect your digestive tract. It's as important as it sounds, this can lead to chronic infections. That's why the side effects of acid blockers also include a lot of other digestive issues, like gastroenteritis, pancreatitis, constipation, nausea, and stomach pain... You could get heartburn just thinking about it!

So what else can you do to find relief from heartburn? There are plenty of safe, natural options. In about 80% of cases, people are actually making too little stomach acid. Why does this cause heartburn you ask? Without a drop in stomach pH from stomach acid secretions, esophageal sphincters don't close and your lower sphincter doesn't open to allow contents out, food sits in your stomach and putrefies, and can 'reflux' back into the esophagus.

After some stomach healing using herbs and other important nutrients often times people actually get the relief they need *taking* supplemental stomach acid – or hydrochloric acid.

And if you truly are making excessive acid – there are natural, safe supplements to help with that too.

One case I had recently involved a young girl, not even 10 years old yet, who'd been on nexium already for several years. She was having chronic stomach pain, constipation, and poor

appetite; she was underweight and her whole personality was affected according to her mother – you can usually trust mothers! She'd been to many doctors already. We tried to get her weaned off the nexium, but this case was not easy. It turned out that she had an infection in an area of her digestive tract that is very hard to diagnose. Luckily we identified the issue correctly and with some strong antibacterial herbs she was already feeling better in less than a week – it had been 9 months of these symptoms! Why did she have this 'difficult-to-identify-illness? She was on an acid blocker! Bacteria had a free ride and once there didn't budge (only strong herbs and even stronger antibiotics help with this). She is already comfortably weaning off the nexium. And why did she start on nexium to begin with? Her mom really wanted to know the answer to this because all of her siblings were stuck on nexium too! Something I learned from my mentor was a study from the seventies that found that children's stomach acid levels dropped to zero after significant viral infections, in this case the mumps. This was likely the cause of the initial drop in stomach acid that caused these kids to get heartburn in the first place!

Most illnesses are diagnosed by testing, but with heartburn your doctor likely didn't test to see if you were making too much stomach acid. There are only two facilities in the country that do this, even though it's not expensive technology. Luckily one facility is in Washington state and, if need be, we can send you for testing.

So if you or someone you know is ready to find relief without nasty acid-blocking medications – please – give us a call! To your digestion!