

Georgia Hormones P.C.

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version 2009-03-29

RESTORING DIGESTIVE HEALTH AND STOMACH ACID PRODUCTION

Shopping List: (from a health food store or compounding pharmacy)

- 1) Refrigerated Probiotics
- 2) Digestive Enzymes
- 3) Deglycyrrhizinated licorice
- 4) Oral Aloe Vera
- 5) Lower doses of your current stomach acid inhibiting medication.

Optional:

- 1) Angostura Bitters (from a liquor package store)
- 2) Betaine HCL

After a big meal, many people suffer from indigestion or heartburn. The new term, Gastro Esophageal Reflux Disease or **GERD** has been popularized in TV ads and medical lectures by the pharmaceutical manufactures. Medications like Nexium *esomeprazole*, Prilosec *omeprazole* and Pepcid *famotidine* were designed to stop the stomach from producing acid. These drugs were originally prescribed for short-term use in the treatment of bleeding stomach and duodenal ulcers. Now, many people take these medications every day **for years** to control their symptoms of heartburn. However, the stomach is supposed to make acid.

Why Do We Need Stomach Acid?: Stomach acid is needed to properly break down protein and digest food. Stomach acid kills many kinds of bacteria that are harmful to the human intestine. Acid is needed for the absorption of Vitamin B-12. Acid is needed for the absorption of calcium and other minerals.

Why People Get GERD?: Food is cheaper in America today than at any time in human history. Average meal size is bigger than it has ever been. **Eating too much** at one meal, especially at night, makes proper digestion more difficult. As we age, our gall bladders don't make as much bile as when we were young. Bile is needed to digest fat. Eating a meal high in fat, especially animal fats from **beef and pork** slows digestion and makes it hard for the stomach to empty. As we age, the stomach may not produce as much of the **digestive enzymes** and stomach acid as is needed. The stomach will not pass what you have eaten through to the intestine until stomach digestion is complete. By eating bigger meals, we are asking our stomachs to do a bigger job, frequently when they have reduced ability to make enzymes and acid. **We are straining our aging stomachs.** There is a muscle band at the top of the stomach that tries to keep the acid from leaking back up into the esophagus. That muscle band can be paralyzed by too much **caffeine, alcohol or emotional tension** and stress. In addition, we tend to **eat late at night**. We frequently lie down with a stomach full of partially digested food. The acid will flow back up into the esophagus and cause heartburn or GERD. **To stop the heartburn, doctors are taught to prescribe medications that keep the stomach from producing acid.**

Stomach Acid and Bacteria: Uncooked foods, including salads, fruits and some shellfish, carry many species of bacteria. Some bacteria are beneficial. Many species have little effect on our health. Some can cause disease. Saliva and stomach acid kill most of the bacteria that enter our mouths. The **beneficial bacteria** that

turn milk into yogurt, Acidophilus, (the name means “acid loving”) survive the acid in the stomach and grow in the intestine, aiding digestion. **Harmful soil bacteria** that remain on raw vegetables, even after rinsing in water, are normally killed by stomach acid. People without stomach acid, over time, can develop abnormal soil bacterial colonies in their intestine. These bacteria can injure the lining of the intestine and interfere with the digestion of proteins, resulting in multiple food allergies, cravings for carbohydrates and weight gain. After years on acid inhibiting medications, many people **gain weight, especially around the middle.**

What Other Problems Can Be Caused By The Medications That Inhibit Stomach Acid?: The medical term for the inability to make stomach acid is a disease called achlorhydria. Nowadays, most achlorhydria is caused by chronic use of acid inhibiting drugs. These drugs were originally designed to help heal stomach, intestinal and esophageal ulcers. **They were meant for short-term, not long-term use.** As mentioned above, without stomach acid, proteins are not properly digested. Vitamin B-12, calcium, magnesium and iron cannot be properly absorbed. This can lead to **anemia, constipation and osteoporosis.** The growth in the intestine of abnormal bacteria leads to **abdominal bloating, gas and weight gain.** In addition, withdrawal from these medications causes a rebound excess production of acid. Sudden withdrawal can result in severe acid reflux. **It can be very hard to stop taking these drugs.**

Restoring Digestive Health: Nexium, Prilosec and Pepcid may help relieve the pain of acid reflux but they don't address the underlying digestive problems that caused the reflux. Symptoms usually return when the medication is stopped, or become even worse. We need to help restore normal digestion. Here are some actions to take:

- Reduce the size of meals, especially at night. Most acid reflux began because of excess eating. Stop eating at least two hours before bedtime.
- Avoid high fat meals, especially red meats, fried foods and high fat dairy items. Fat slows digestion and prolongs the time it takes for the stomach to empty.
- Reduce alcohol and caffeine consumption. For healing, both may need to be stopped entirely.
- Replacement **digestive enzymes** are available at health food stores. They can be taken with each meal.
- **Probiotic** bacteria, taken regularly, can help restore the normal bacterial balance in the intestine.
- **Deglycyrrhizinated licorice and Aloe Vera** are soothing and help heal an esophagus injured by reflux
- Herbal “Bitters” like **Angostura**, are usually used in mixed drinks. They can be purchased at package liquor stores. Before meals, a few drops can be taken in two tablespoons of water to promote normal healthy stomach acid production.
- **Betaine Hydrochloride** is sold as pills that release acid in the stomach to promote digestion.

These digestive aids can help you gradually wean off acid suppressing medications and restore digestive health. Probiotic bacteria should be part of your daily vitamin and supplement routine. Many people can benefit from digestive enzymes and Betaine HCl used with each meal or just the larger meals.

Weaning Off Your Prescription Medications:

1. Begin the life style changes listed above.
2. Begin the digestive aids listed above. They can be purchased at a health food store or compounding pharmacy.
3. Reduce the dose of your prescription medication. Stay at the lower dose for a least two weeks before any further reductions.
4. If you are feeling good, without acid reflux, continue to reduce the dose or go to every other day. Stay with each reduction for at least two weeks before going lower.
5. You can stay on the digestive enzymes, probiotics, bitters and Betaine HCl forever, if needed.
6. Once you are completely off the medication, it is still OK to take your acid inhibiting medication for a few days if you have an episode of heartburn or esophagitis. Once you are healed, stop the medication again.