

Acid reflux

is an extremely common health problem. So common, in fact, that it affects one out of two of you watching this video. Other terms used for this condition are gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) or peptic ulcer disease. Typically, acid reflux is thought to be caused by having too much acid in your stomach. This is a serious medical mistake that affects hundreds of millions of people.

What's the REAL Cause of Acid Reflux?

It's important to understand that acid reflux is NOT a disease of too much acid being produced, but rather it's a condition related more commonly to hiatal hernia – a condition in which the acid is coming out of your stomach, where it's supposed to remain.

After food passes through your esophagus into your stomach, a muscular valve called the lower esophageal sphincter (LES) closes, preventing food or acid to move back up. Gastroesophageal reflux occurs when the LES relaxes inappropriately, allowing acid from your stomach to flow (reflux) backward into your esophagus.

Heartburn is the primary symptom of acid reflux -- a burning sensation that radiates up from your stomach to your chest and throat. It's typically most bothersome at night, and tends to occur in connection with certain activities, such as:

- After eating a heavy meal
- Bending over
- Lifting
- Lying down, especially when laying on your back

Other symptoms include:

- Hoarseness
- A feeling that food is stuck in your throat
- Tightness in your throat
- Wheezing
- Asthma
- Dental problems
- Bad breath

While I was in residency training in medical school in the early 80s, an Australian physician named Dr. Barry Marshall did some pioneering work on [acid reflux](#). He discovered that an organism called *Helicobacter pylori* (initially called *campylobacter*) causes a chronic low-level inflammation of your stomach lining, and is responsible, or at least a major factor, for producing many of the symptoms of acid reflux.

There are over 16,000 articles supporting the fact that suppressing stomach acid does not treat the problem. It only treats the symptoms. And one of the explanations for this is that when you suppress the amount of acid in your stomach, you decrease your body's ability to kill the helicobacter bacteria. So it actually makes your condition worse and perpetuates the problem.

Of course, now we have treatments such as antibiotics that are designed to eradicate that organism. However, I've found that it's virtually never necessary to use antibiotics, and I'll share several simple, effective strategies to eliminate the helicobacter without the use of drugs.

How to Wean Yourself Off Dangerous Acid Reflux Drugs

If you suffer with this condition, and made the unwise choice of seeing a conventional physician for it, you've likely been put on a proton pump inhibitor like [Prilosec](#) or Prevacid.

Please understand that these are **very dangerous drugs**. It's the last thing you'll want to take for this condition.

Unfortunately, proton pump inhibitors are very popular because they work quite well. However, you'll develop both tolerance and dependence on them, so you can't stop taking them without suffering serious repercussions.

You should NEVER stop taking proton pump inhibitors cold turkey. You have to wean yourself off them gradually or else you'll experience a severe rebound of your symptoms, and the problem may end up being worse than before you started taking the medication.

Ideally, you'll want to get a lower dose than you're on now, and then gradually decrease your dose. Once you get down to the lowest dose of the proton pump inhibitor, you can start substituting with an over-the-counter H2 blocker like Tagamet, Cimetidine, Zantac, or Ranitidine. Then gradually wean off the H2 blocker over the next several weeks.

Safe and Effective Strategies That Can Eliminate Acid Reflux

While you wean yourself off these drugs (if you're already on one), you'll want to start implementing a lifestyle modification program that can eliminate this condition once and for all.

These strategies include:

- **Eliminating food triggers** -- Food allergies can be a problem, so you'll want to completely eliminate items such as caffeine, alcohol, and all nicotine products.
- **Increasing your body's natural production of stomach acid** -- Like I said earlier, acid reflux is not caused by too much acid in your stomach -- it's usually a problem with *too little* acid. One of the simplest strategies to encourage your body to make sufficient amounts of hydrochloric acid (stomach acid) is to consume enough of the raw material.

One of the simplest, most basic food items that many people neglect is a high quality sea salt (unprocessed salt).

I recommend eliminating [processed, regular table salt](#) for a lot of different reasons, all of which I've reviewed before. But an unprocessed salt like Himalayan salt -- one of the best salts on the planet -- will not only provide you with the chloride your body needs to make hydrochloric acid, it also contains over 80 trace minerals your body needs to perform optimally, biochemically.

- **Taking a hydrochloric acid supplement** -- Another option is to take a betaine hydrochloric supplement, which is available in health food stores without prescription. You'll want to take as many as you need to get the slightest burning sensation and then decrease by one capsule. This will help your body to better digest your food, and will also help kill the helicobacter and normalize your symptoms.
- **Modifying your diet** -- Eating large amounts of processed foods and sugars is a surefire way to exacerbate acid reflux as it will upset the bacterial balance in your stomach and intestine.

Instead, you'll want to eat a lot of vegetables, and high quality, [organic](#), biodynamic, and [locally grown foods](#). You can also supplement with a high quality probiotic or make sure you include [fermented foods](#) in your diet. This will help balance your bowel flora, which can help eliminate helicobacter naturally.

- **Optimizing your vitamin D levels** -- As I've mentioned many times in the past, vitamin D is essential, and it's essential for this condition as well because there's likely an infectious component causing the problem. Once [your vitamin D levels](#) are optimized, you're also going to optimize your production of 200 antimicrobial peptides that will help your body eradicate *any* infections that shouldn't be there.

You'll want to make sure your vitamin D level is about 60 ng/ml, and I strongly recommend you use LabCorp, which is a high quality testing facility.

As I've discussed in many previous articles, you can increase your vitamin D levels through [appropriate amounts of sun exposure](#), or through the use of a [safe tanning bed](#).

If neither of those are available, you can take an oral vitamin D3 supplement. However, whenever you use oral vitamin D, it's imperative you get tested regularly to make sure you're not reaching toxic levels.

- **Implementing an exercise routine** – Exercise is yet another way to improve your body's immune system, which is imperative to fight off all kinds of infections.

Are You Suffering a Drug Side Effect?

Besides these underlying conditions, please beware that certain prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) medications can also cause heartburn. Common culprits include anxiety medications and antidepressants, antibiotics, blood pressure medications, nitroglycerin, osteoporosis drugs, and pain relievers.

If your heartburn is caused by a medication you're taking, the answer is, of course, to address what, when, and how you're taking that drug. Please do not make the mistake of simply adding yet another drug to counteract this side effect. WebMD³ offers a number of helpful tips for how to address drug-induced heartburn, such as:

- Avoid taking more than the recommended or prescribed dose
- Some medications are best taken on an empty stomach, while others are less likely to cause side effects like heartburn when taken with a meal. Check the label for instructions, or ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice on when and how to take your medication
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist to review ALL the medications and supplements you're taking to see if one or more of them cause heartburn.

Changing the dose or switching to another medication may be advisable to ease your heartburn. Some drugs may be available in cream form rather than a pill, which would be far less likely to cause heartburn

- Avoid laying down right after taking your medication
- Drink some ginger tea

Why Medications for Heartburn Can Do More Harm Than Good

One of the most commonly prescribed drugs for heartburn and acid reflux are proton pump inhibitors (PPIs), which are very effective at blocking acid production in your stomach.

While that may sound like an appropriate remedy, considering the fact that stomach acid is creeping up your esophagus, in most cases it's actually the *worst* approach possible, as a major part of the problem is typically related to your stomach producing *too little* stomach acid.

There are over 16,000 articles in the medical literature showing that suppressing stomach acid does not address the problem. It only temporarily treats the symptoms.

PPIs like Nexium, Prilosec, and Prevacid were originally designed to treat a very *limited* range of *severe* problems. According to Mitchell Katz, director of the San Francisco Department of Public Health, who wrote an editorial⁴ on this topic four years ago, proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) are only warranted for the treatment of:

- Bleeding ulcers
- Zollinger-Ellison syndrome (a rare condition that causes your stomach to produce excess acid)
- Severe acid reflux, where an endoscopy has confirmed that your esophagus is damaged

According to Katz, "about 60 to 70 percent of people taking these drugs have mild heartburn and shouldn't be on them." Part of the problem with PPIs is that when you suppress the amount of acid in your stomach, you decrease your body's ability to kill the helicobacter bacteria. So if your heartburn is caused by an *H. pylori* infection, it actually makes your condition worse and perpetuates the problem. Besides that, reducing acid in your stomach diminishes your primary defense mechanism for food-borne infections, which will increase your risk of food poisoning. PPI drugs can also cause potentially serious side effects, including pneumonia, bone loss, [hip fractures](#), and infection with *Clostridium difficile* (a harmful intestinal bacteria).

Warning: Proton Pump Inhibitors Tend to Cause Dependence

It's also worth noting that you'll also develop both tolerance and dependence on PPI drugs, so you should not stop taking proton pump inhibitors cold turkey. You need to wean yourself off them gradually or else you might experience a severe rebound of your symptoms. In some cases, the problem may end up being worse than before you started taking the medication.

Ideally, you'll want to get a lower dose than you're on now, and then gradually decrease your dose. Once you get down to the lowest dose of the proton pump inhibitor, you can start substituting with an over-the-counter H2 blocker like Tagamet, Cimetidine, Zantac, or Ranitidine. Then gradually wean off the H2 blocker over the next several weeks.

While you wean yourself off these drugs (if you're already on one), you'll want to start implementing a lifestyle modification program that can eliminate this condition once and for all. Antibiotics can typically eradicate *H. pylori*, but there are many other effective strategies that can also work. Ideally, you'd want to try these first, as antibiotics will also kill off the [beneficial bacteria](#) in your gut, which can cause other health complications. Besides, *H. pylori* is growing increasingly resistant to antibiotics, making the availability of non-drug alternatives even more important.

Your First Line of Treatment – Unprocessed Foods and Probiotics

Ultimately, the answer to heartburn and acid indigestion is to restore your natural gastric balance and function. Eating large amounts of processed foods and sugars is a surefire way to exacerbate acid reflux as it will upset the bacterial balance in your stomach and intestine. Instead, you'll want to eat a lot of vegetables and other high-quality, ideally organic, unprocessed foods. Also, eliminate food triggers from your diet. Common culprits here include caffeine, alcohol, and nicotine products.

Next, you need to make sure you're getting enough beneficial bacteria from your diet. This will help balance your bowel flora, which can help eliminate *H. pylori* bacteria naturally without resorting to antibiotics. It will also aid in proper digestion and assimilation of your food. Ideally, you'll want to get your probiotics from [fermented foods](#). If you aren't eating fermented foods, you most likely need to supplement with a probiotic on a regular basis. Ideally, you'll want to include a variety of cultured foods and beverages in your diet, as each food will inoculate your gut with a variety of different microorganisms. Fermented foods you can easily make at home include:

- [Fermented vegetables](#)
- Chutneys
- Cultured dairy, such as yoghurt, kefir, and sour cream
- Fish, such as mackerel and Swedish gravlax

Addressing Low Acid Production

As mentioned earlier, heartburn is typically a sign of having too little stomach acid. To encourage your body to make sufficient amounts of hydrochloric acid (stomach acid), you'll also want to make sure you're consuming enough of the raw material on a regular basis.

High-quality sea salt (unprocessed salt), such as Himalayan salt, will not only provide you with the chloride your body needs to make hydrochloric acid, it also contains over 80 trace minerals your body needs to perform optimally, biochemically. Sauerkraut or cabbage juice is also a strong—if not the strongest—stimulant for your body to produce stomach acid. Having a few teaspoons of cabbage juice before eating, or better yet, fermented cabbage juice from sauerkraut, will do wonders to improve your digestion.

Other Safe and Effective Strategies to Eliminate Heartburn and Acid Reflux

Besides addressing your day-to-day diet and optimizing your gut flora, a number of other strategies can also help you get your heartburn under control, sans medications. The following suggestions are drawn from a variety of sources, including Everydayroots.com, which lists 15 different natural remedies for heartburn;⁶ as well as research from the University of Maryland School of Medicine,⁷ the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center,⁸ and others.

As mentioned earlier, acid reflux typically results from having *too little* acid in your stomach.

1. Raw, unfiltered apple cider vinegar

You can easily improve the acid content of your stomach by taking one tablespoon of raw unfiltered [apple cider vinegar](#) in a large glass of water.

Another option is to take a betaine hydrochloric supplement, which is available in health food stores without prescription. You'll want to take as many as you need to get the slightest burning sensation and then decrease by one capsule. This will help your body to better digest your food, and will also help kill the *H. pylori* bacteria.

2. Betaine

One-half to one full teaspoon of baking soda (sodium bicarbonate) in an eight-ounce glass of water may ease the burn of acid reflux as it helps neutralize stomach acid. I would not recommend this as a regular solution but it can sure help in an emergency when you are in excruciating pain.

3. Baking soda

The juice of the aloe plant naturally helps reduce inflammation, which may ease symptoms of acid reflux. Drink about 1/2 cup of aloe vera juice before meals. If you want to avoid its laxative effect, look for a brand that has removed the laxative component.

4. Aloe juice

Ginger has been found to have a gastroprotective effect by blocking acid and suppressing *helicobacter pylori*.⁹ According to a 2007 study,¹⁰ it's also far superior to lansoprazole for preventing the formation of ulcers, exhibiting six- to eight-fold greater potency over the drug! This is perhaps not all that surprising, considering the fact that ginger root has been traditionally used against gastric disturbances since ancient times.

5. Ginger root or chamomile tea

Add two or three slices of fresh ginger root to two cups of hot water. Let steep for about half an hour. Drink about 20 minutes or so before your meal.

Before bed, try a cup of chamomile tea, which can help soothe stomach inflammation and help you sleep.

Vitamin D is important for addressing any infectious component. Once your vitamin D levels are optimized, you're also going to optimize your production of about 200 antimicrobial peptides that will help your body eradicate *any* infection that shouldn't be there.

6. Vitamin D

As I've discussed in many previous articles, you can increase your vitamin D levels through appropriate amounts of sun exposure, or through the use of a safe tanning bed. If neither of those are available, you can take an oral vitamin D3 supplement; just remember to also increase your [vitamin K2](#) intake.

This exceptionally potent antioxidant was found to reduce symptoms of acid reflux in patients when compared to a placebo, particularly in those with pronounced *helicobacter pylori* infection.¹¹ Best results were obtained at a daily dose of 40 mg.

7. Astaxanthin

8. Slippery elm

Slippery elm coats and soothes the mouth, throat, stomach, and intestines, and

contains antioxidants that can help address inflammatory bowel conditions. It also stimulates nerve endings in your gastrointestinal tract. This helps increase mucus secretion, which protects your gastrointestinal tract against ulcers and excess acidity. The University of Maryland Medical Center¹² makes the following adult dosing recommendations:

- Tea: Pour 2 cups boiling water over 4 g (roughly 2 tablespoons) of powdered bark, then steep for 3 - 5 minutes. Drink 3 times per day.
- Tincture: 5 mL 3 times per day.
- Capsules: 400 - 500 mg 3 - 4 times daily for 4 - 8 weeks. Take with a full glass of water.
- Lozenges: follow dosing instructions on label.

9. Chinese herbs for the treatment of "Gu" symptoms caused by chronic inflammatory diseases

So-called "Gu" symptoms include digestive issues associated with inflammation and pathogenic infestation. For more information about classical herbs used in Chinese Medicine for the treatment of such symptoms, please see the article, "Treating Chronic Inflammatory Diseases with Chinese Herbs: 'Gu Syndrome' in Modern Clinical Practice," published by the Pacific College of Oriental Medicine

Research¹³ published in 2009 found that gastrointestinal damage caused by *H. pylori* can be addressed with the amino acid glutamine, found in many foods, including beef, chicken, fish, eggs, dairy products, and some fruits and vegetables. L-glutamine, the biologically active isomer of glutamine, is also widely available as a supplement.

10. Glutamine

11. Folate or folic acid (vitamin B9) and other B vitamins

As reported by clinical nutritionist Byron Richards,¹⁴ research suggests B vitamins can reduce your risk for acid reflux. Higher folic acid intake was found to reduce acid reflux by approximately 40 percent. Low vitamin B2 and B6 levels were also linked to an increased risk for acid reflux. The best way to raise your folate levels is by eating folate-rich whole foods, such as liver, asparagus, spinach, okra, and beans.

You Don't Need a Drug to Banish Acid Reflux

To recap, the answer to gastric problems like ulcers and acid indigestion is to restore your natural gastric balance and function. Not only is it useful for optimal gut function but it is crucial for your long-term health, as your gut flora can increase your absorption of nutrients, and play a significant role in mental and physical health. It is very clear from reviewing the literature that you can't be healthy until your gut flora is optimized. That is one of the ways eating sugars harm you—they push your gut flora balance in the wrong direction.

Switching from processed foods to whole foods is therefore step number one. To further optimize your gut health, you'll want to make sure you're consuming enough good bacteria from traditionally fermented foods, such as fermented vegetables, or in a probiotic supplement. This will help balance your bowel flora, which can help eliminate *Helicobacter* bacteria naturally. If you have heartburn, acid reflux, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), peptic ulcer disease, or any acid-related condition, the strategies listed above may also offer relief.

For even more information, I encourage you to read natural health pioneer Dr. Jonathan Wright's excellent book [*Your Stomach: What is Really Making You Miserable and What to Do About It*](#). Last but not least, you could even try the Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT). In the video below, EFT practitioner Julie Schiffman demonstrates how to tap for acid reflux. **Some Natural Remedies Work Better than Drugs—including Water!**

The first study, featured above, found that even something as simple as drinking water can help suppress acute symptoms of acid reflux by temporarily raising stomach pH.

A dozen subjects were given either:

- A glass of water
- Antacid
- Ranitidine
- Omeprazole
- Esomeprazole, or
- Rabeprazole

Their gastric pH was recorded for six hours after each drug intake. In 10 of the 12 subjects, water increased gastric pH by more than 4 after just one minute. In contrast, antacid took two minutes, and the remaining four drugs took between 50 minutes and almost three hours to reduce pH by the same amount.

The gastric pH remained raised for three minutes after drinking water, and 12 minutes with antacids. The other drugs maintained the raised pH for at least six hours—but again suppressing your stomach acid in this way may eventually *worsen* your condition, particularly if *helicobacter pylori* bacteria are involved.

Now granted, drinking a large glass of water may not be sufficient for many with acid reflux (although I'd say it won't hurt to give it a try!), but this study just goes to show that very simple strategies can oftentimes accomplish what you're aiming for, without resorting to potentially dangerous drugs. In this case, one strategy in particular should be at the very top of your list if you suffer with heartburn...

Your First Line of Treatment – Increasing Healthy Bacterial Flora

Ultimately, the answer to heartburn and acid indigestion is to *restore* your natural gastric balance and function. Not only is it useful for optimal gut function but it is crucial for your long-term health, as your gut flora can increase your absorption of nutrients by 50 percent and create useful B vitamins and vitamin K2. It is very clear from reviewing the literature that you can't be healthy until your gut flora is optimized. That is one of the ways sugars harm you—they push your gut flora balance in the wrong direction.

So one of the first things you'll want to do is to make sure you're consuming enough [good bacteria](#). This will help balance your bowel flora, which can help eliminate helicobacter bacteria naturally. It will also aid in proper digestion and assimilation of your food.

Ideally, you'll want to get your beneficial bacteria from traditionally [fermented foods](#), such as:

- Natto
- Fermented vegetables, like kimchee
- [Kefir](#), a fermented milk drink made from RAW milk
- Yoghurt made from raw milk

However, you can be virtually guaranteed that if you are purchasing products like yogurt and kefir from a conventional grocery store, they're worse than worthless. Not only do most of them have no live cultures but they are loaded with sugar to make them taste better. So make sure to check the labels of any commercial products you buy, and avoid those with ANY added sugars.

Also avoid pasteurized products.

Some health food stores might have the authentically fermented healthy foods, but most likely you will have to make them yourself or purchase them from healthy organizations like [Weston Price Chapters](#) that hook communities up to [sources of these types of traditional foods](#).

If you are unable to find access to these traditionally fermented foods then it makes perfect sense to use a high quality probiotic. There is little doubt in my mind that if you can only do one or two supplements, probiotics are the one that should make the cut.

Other Novel Alternatives Indicated by Medical Research

Before I move on to discuss potential drug complications and my top six recommendations to safely eliminate heartburn and acid reflux, I want to highlight four additional alternatives, based on a quick review of the medical literature.¹

- **Sauerkraut or cabbage juice** is one of the strongest stimulants for your body to produce acid. This is a good thing as many people have low stomach acid, which is the cause of their gut problems. Having a few teaspoons of cabbage juice before eating, or better yet, fermented cabbage juice from sauerkraut, will do wonders to improve your digestion.
- **Astaxanthin**—This exceptionally potent antioxidant was found to reduce symptoms of acid reflux in patients² when compared to a placebo, particularly in those with pronounced *helicobacter pylori* infection. Best results were obtained at a daily dose of 40 mg.
- **A dietary supplement containing melatonin, l-tryptophan, vitamin B6, folic acid, vitamin B12, methionine and betaine**, was found to be superior to the drug omeprazole³ in the treatment of GERD.

Part of the success is thought to be due to melatonin's inhibitory activity on nitric oxide biosynthesis, which plays an important role in transient lower esophageal sphincter (LES) relaxation, which, as I mentioned earlier, is part of the real underlying problem of GERD.

Impressively, 100 percent of patients receiving this supplement reported a complete regression of symptoms after 40 days of treatment, compared to just under 66 percent of those taking omeprazole. The authors concluded that "this formulation promotes regression of GERD symptoms with no significant side effects."

- **Ginger** has been found to have a gastroprotective effect by blocking acid and suppressing *helicobacter pylori*.⁴ According to a 2007 study, it's also far superior to lansoprazole for preventing the formation of ulcers,⁵ exhibiting six- to eight-fold greater potency over the drug! This is perhaps not all that surprising, considering the fact that ginger root has been traditionally used against gastric disturbances since ancient times.

Drugs Are NOT Advisable for Majority of Heartburn and Acid Reflux Cases

Now on to the drugs... One of the most commonly prescribed drugs for heartburn and acid reflux are proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) or drugs that VERY effectively block your stomach's ability to produce acid. While that may sound like a good thing, in most cases it's the worst possible approach, because as I mentioned earlier, the problem typically stems from having *too little* stomach acid.

Proton pump inhibitors like Nexium, Prilosec, and Prevacid are severely overprescribed and misused. As a result they end up hurting far more people than they're helping, because these drugs are actually designed to treat a very *limited* range of *severe* problems. According to Mitchell Katz, director of the San Francisco Department of Public Health who wrote an editorial on this topic,⁶ proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) are only warranted for the treatment of:

- Bleeding ulcers
- Infection with the ulcer-causing bacteria *Helicobacter pylori*
- Zollinger-Ellison syndrome (a rare condition that causes your stomach to produce excess acid)
- Severe acid reflux, where an endoscopy has confirmed that your esophagus is damaged

PPIs were never intended for people with heartburn, and according to Katz, "about 60 to 70 percent of people taking these drugs have mild heartburn and shouldn't be on them." However, I believe the number may be even higher than that, because there are over 16,000 articles supporting the fact that suppressing stomach acid does NOT treat *helicobacter pylori* infection (which Katz included above). If you're taking a PPI drug to treat your heartburn you're doing two things, but neither of them is actually beneficial to your health:

- You're treating a symptom only; you're not addressing the underlying cause, and
- By doing so, you're exposing yourself to *additional*, and potentially *more dangerous* health problems, courtesy of the drug itself