

Heartburn and Acid Indigestion

By: Horace Simmons

Heartburn, or acid indigestion, seems to be a big problem in this country. The common belief is that too much acid in the stomach causes it, and antacids are the typical solution.

But the common belief is oversimplified. Stomach acid is produced primarily to digest proteins. Even the smell of food cooking is enough to start the juices flowing. But that does not cause a problem. And if only one bite of food is taken, no acid indigestion occurs. Two bites of steak will not cause the problem. Here is a stomach producing acid in response to consumption, but no heartburn. But eat a big meal, and it's a problem.

So what's really happening? As we age, our stomachs produce less hydrochloric acid. In medicine, this is called hypochloridia, and is thought to affect half of the population over 50. When people are under stress, the production of stomach acid is also reduced.

When more food is eaten than there is acid to digest, the food can begin to ferment in the stomach. This produces gas, which can cause a bit of stomach fluid to enter the esophagus, which does not have a lining to protect us from the burn of the acid.

What can be done? Well, many doctors recommend taking betaine hydrochloride tablets at the start of a big meal. Others have found that having a couple of teaspoons of vinegar will provide the acid needed to provide relief from the heartburn. Sometimes, just having vinegar dressing on a salad will be enough to prevent the problem.

Either way, digestion proceeds more completely, and the person experiences no discomfort.

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