

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Dr. Michiel Rorick

Preventing Heartburn Naturally

There has been an influx of ads pitching heartburn relief drugs recently. The ads make heartburn seem like a simple problem with a simple solution. But medication is never a simple solution. Dr. Rorick is concerned about the upswing in the use of these drugs — which may have potentially dangerous side effects. Dr. Rorick encourages patients prone to heartburn to focus on all-natural prevention strategies for relief.



What Is Heartburn?

Heartburn is a common condition. In fact, a 2006 study in the journal *Lancet* found that one in four people in Western countries suffer from heartburn at least once per month (*Lancet* 2006;367:2086-100). Frequent heartburn is usually a symptom of GERD (gastroesophageal reflux), although other conditions, such as hiatal hernia, are related to heartburn.

Normally, when we eat or drink, the esophageal sphincter — a circular band of muscle around the bottom of the esophagus — relaxes to allow food and liquid to travel down into the stomach, then closes again. But if the esophageal sphincter isn't working properly, stomach acid can flow back up into the esophagus, causing heartburn.

The acid in the esophagus causes a burning sensation in the upper abdomen and chest — or even the back of the throat, jaw, arms and back. It usually feels worse when lying down or bending forward.

Dangers of Heartburn Medications

Popular over-the-counter medications for heartburn include antacids, H-2 receptor blockers and proton pump inhibitors. Dr. Rorick urges patients to understand that, although they are popular, these drugs all harbor potentially serious side effects.

Side Effects of Antacids

Antacids, such as ROLAIDS®, Tums® and Maalox®, neutralize stomach acid. The active ingredients in antacids are typically one or more of the following: magnesium, aluminum hydroxide, sodium bicarbonate or calcium carbonate.

Antacids may instigate problems for people with certain conditions or taking certain medications. For instance, individuals who have high blood pressure or are on a sodium-restricted diet should not take antacids containing sodium bicarbonate due to their high sodium content.

People with kidney stones should not take calcium carbonate antacids because they may exacerbate kidney problems. Also, the combination of antacids and certain drugs can lead to serious health disorders. Drugs that should not be taken in conjunction with antacids include tetracycline, indomethacin, buffered and non-buffered aspirin, iron supplements, digoxin, quinidine, Valium and corticosteroids.

In addition, overuse of some antacids can cause gastrointestinal side effects, such as diarrhea or constipation.

Remarkably, calcium carbonate antacids may eventually worsen heartburn by causing an increase in stomach

acid.

Side Effects of H-2 Receptor Blockers and Proton Pump Inhibitors

H-2 receptor blockers (H-2 blockers) include drugs such as Tagamet HB 200®, Pepcid AC® and Zantac 75®. Proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) include drugs such as Prilosec OTC® and Nexium®. Some of these medications, which were previously only available via prescription, are now available over the counter.

Instead of neutralizing stomach acid, these medications reduce the production of acid. Specifically, H-2 receptor blockers suppress the production of acid in cells lining the interior of the stomach. PPIs shut down the chemical “pump” needed for stomach cells to make acid.

Heart Disease

In the summer of 2007, the US Food and Drug Administration and Health Canada announced that they were looking into possible cardiac risks of popular H-2 blockers.

The agencies cited two studies, which indicated a link between use of these medications and a bolstered risk of heart attack.

**Dr. Michiel Rorick, Houston Health & Wellness Centers (281) 496-3355
2550 Gray Falls, #120, Houston, TX 77077 www.hhandw.net**

Leaving Body Vulnerable to Disease

Research reveals that H-2 blockers and PPIs up the risk of developing pneumonia and diarrhea. The risk is increased because stomach acid is essential for fending off pathogens. By reducing stomach acid, these drugs leave the body vulnerable to disease.

One 2004 study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* found that “reduction of gastric acid secretion by acid-suppressive therapy allows pathogen colonization from the upper gastrointestinal tract.” The study concludes: “Current use of gastric acid-suppressive therapy was associated with an increased risk of community-acquired pneumonia.” (*JAMA* 2004;292:1955-60.)

Another 2004 study that looked at 1,187 hospital patients in Montreal concluded that “patients in hospital who received proton pump inhibitors were at increased risk of *C. difficile* diarrhea.” (*CMAJ* 2004;171:33-8.)

Hip Fracture

In addition, researchers have recently uncovered a relationship between the use of proton pump inhibitors and hip fracture. A 2006 *JAMA* study proposed that PPIs “may interfere with calcium absorption through induction of hypochlorhydria but they also may reduce bone resorption through inhibition of osteoclastic vacuolar proton pumps.” The study concluded that “long-term PPI therapy, particularly at high doses, is associated with an increased risk of hip fracture.” (*JAMA* 2006;296:2947-53.)

Mental Decline

Initial studies have found that long-term use of H-2 blockers may increase the risk of mental decline later in life. The analysis, which looked at 1,558 African-Americans over age 65, found that seniors who reported “continuous use” of H-2 blockers had a 2.4-fold higher chance of some form of cognitive impairment. Researchers speculate that by blocking stomach acid, H-2 blockers interfere with the absorption of vitamin B-12, which is important for mental function (*J Am Geriatr Soc* 2007;55:1248-53).

All-Natural Heartburn Relief

Following are some important prevention-oriented tips advocated by doctors of chiropractic.

Lose Some Weight

Researchers have long acknowledged that excess weight contributes to heartburn. They aren't sure exactly why, but suspect that extra fat around the belly puts pressure on the stomach, causing fluid to rise up.

And new research reveals that even a few extra pounds can boost heartburn risk. Fortunately, another new study found that losing only a few pounds can decrease heartburn symptoms.

The study concludes: “BMI [body mass index] is associated with symptoms of gastroesophageal reflux disease in both normal-weight and overweight women. Even moderate weight gain among persons of normal weight may cause or exacerbate symptoms of reflux.” (*N Engl J Med* 2006;354:2340-8.)

In addition, try to eat small meals and eat slowly — again to keep pressure off the esophageal sphincter.

Keep Your Head Elevated

A new study proves that head of bed elevation is an effective method for alleviating heartburn (*Arch Intern Med* 2006;166:965-71).

The key is to keep your esophagus higher than your stomach. Use blocks or bricks under the bedpost to raise the head of your bed 6 inches so you can sleep with head and chest elevated. You can also try a foam wedge, available at drugstores and medical supply stores, inserted between your mattress and box spring. Don't just pile up pillows, which could put your head at an angle that could actually make heartburn worse.

In addition, don't lie down two to three hours after you eat.

Keep a Diet Diary

Although recent research reveals that diet isn't as closely linked to heartburn as once thought, it may still be a trigger for some individuals. A food journal will reveal if you have particular triggers. Some common culprits include fatty or fried foods, alcohol,

chocolate, peppermint, garlic, onion, tomatoes, caffeine and nicotine.

In addition, a 2005 study found that nighttime heartburn is strongly associated with carbonated soft drink consumption and use of benzodiazepines (a type of sleeping pill) (*Chest* 2005;127:1658-66).

Another 2005 study found that a high-fiber, low-fat diet protects against GERD (*Gut* 2005;54:11-7).

Finally, you may want to consider chewing gum after meals to prevent heartburn. Studies show gum chewing reduces acid in the esophagus.

Be Aware of Medications

A variety of medications may spark heartburn, including:

- ✓ Aspirin
- ✓ NSAIDs
- ✓ Narcotic pain relievers
- ✓ Antihistamines
- ✓ Asthma medications
- ✓ Antibiotics
- ✓ Heart medications
- ✓ Anti-anxiety medications
- ✓ Osteoporosis medications
- ✓ Steroids
- ✓ Chemotherapy drugs
- ✓ Anticholinergics

Visit the Chiropractor

Chiropractors use gentle, effective and safe maneuvers called chiropractic adjustments to remove spinal subluxations, allowing your body to function at optimal capacity.

In addition, the science of chiropractic upholds that the causes of patients' complaints must be addressed, not just their symptoms. So, if you have heartburn, chiropractic care will work to unearth the source of your disorder.

Optimal Health University™ is a professional service of PreventiCare Publishing®. The information and recommendations appearing on these pages are appropriate in most instances; but they are not a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. Optimal Health University™ may be photocopied (NOT reprinted) exactly as they are published noncommercially by current subscribers ONLY to share with patients or potential patients. Optimal Health University™ may NOT be reprinted in any print or electronic publication including newsletters, newspapers, magazines or Web sites. Any other reproductions are subject to PreventiCare Publishing® approval. Copyright, 2008, PreventiCare Publishing®. 1-912-897-3040. www.preventicare.com