

NUTRITION UPDATE

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Do Nutritional Supplements Cost or Save?

This is a very thought provoking question, and the quick answer will often prove to be wrong.

Given the growing talk over the past several years about health care reform, the Dietary Supplement Education Alliance commissioned the Lewin Group, a premier national health care and human services policy research group, to examine the health impacts and cost offsets associated with nutritional supplement use. Other clients of the Lewin Group include governments, industries and associations.

The study looked at the use of supplements for which there is a strong research established benefit link such as omega-3 fatty acids and coronary heart disease, and lutein/zeaxanthin and age-related macular degeneration.

The study estimated that the total potential healthcare savings for the dietary supplement interventions studied to be approximately \$24 billion over five years. We should not forget the huge human impact of reduced disease and suffering that must result in these savings. The estimate for the use of omega-3 fatty acids was \$3.2 billion preventing 374,301 hospitalizations from cardiac events.

Unfortunately, little about the recent health care reform efforts has addressed anything like this level of preventative thinking. The system of reimbursement is centered on only paying for treatment

once we get diseased and “traditional” therapies for ongoing management.

As it has always been, it then comes down to the individual to be responsible for their own preventative efforts. Fortunately, these efforts pay off big both in disease prevention as well as cost savings. We should all be practicing preventative nutrition. ♦

Indigestion and Reflux: Getting Effective, Natural Relief

Indigestion and reflux are overlapping terms generally referring to pain in the upper abdomen or chest associated with eating. These complaints seem to be coming epidemic. How many people have these symptoms?

- 60% of adults report them in any year
- 20% report them in any given week

Perhaps the worst statistic is that the problem is growing each year.

The symptoms of reflux syndrome or indigestion include:

- Stomach pain, burning - “Heartburn”
- Regurgitation
- Difficulty swallowing
- Nausea, chest pain
- Non-digestive symptoms
 - Cough
 - Sleep disturbance
 - Asthma
 - Sinusitis

The solution to these symptoms has been the broad use of medications that inhibit stomach acid production. In many ways this can actually be counter-productive in many patients as it interferes with their normal digestion of food which begins in the stomach with **acid**.

Stomach acid secretion is a major necessary step in normal digestion particularly of protein and to some extent of fat. Many people with symptoms of reflux and indigestion produce too little stomach acid. Because they digest food poorly in the stomach, it is not passed on to the small intestine for further digestion quickly enough. The food is then worked on by bacteria in the stomach by fermentation and putrefaction, two processes that produce gas. It is often prolonged presence of food in the stomach and subsequent gas production that produces both the symptoms and some reflux of the stomach contents back into the lower esophagus.



"THAT'S THE WORST CASE OF ACID REFLUX I'VE EVER SEEN!"

The above problem is called **hypochlorhydria** which simply means low stomach acid production.

Who gets hypochlorhydria?

From approximately age 35 and on, most people begin to secrete less stomach acid. By the time people reach their 50's, it is estimated that over 50% have low stomach acid, also called hypochlorhydria.

Why is stomach acid needed?

- Without stomach acid, we can't digest and absorb the protein we eat. That's because stomach acid is needed to produce an enzyme called pepsin, which breaks down protein.
- Fat and carbohydrate absorption also rely on stomach acid. Stomach acid causes the release of secretin, which then triggers the pancreas to produce enzymes that digest fat (lipase), protein (protease), and carbohydrates (amylase) once the food is passed into the small intestine.
- Stomach acid helps keep the digestive tract sterile, preventing the overgrowth of bacteria and yeast. Low stomach acid can lead to bacterial overgrowth or candida yeast infection.
- Stomach acid is needed to properly absorb micronutrients, including vitamin B12, vitamin C, vitamin K, the B-complex vitamins, calcium, zinc, magnesium and iron.
- Because of all the factors above hypochlorhydria is believed to be involved in indigestion, premature aging, food sensitivities, nutritional deficiency, bacterial overgrowth, yeast infections, weak hair, skin, nails, and a host of other conditions.

Who is Likely to Have Hypochlorhydria?

Between 40% and 50% of people with indigestion and symptoms of reflux do not respond well or completely to medications that suppress stomach acid. This large group typically has their symptoms because of low stomach acid.

Many people with true reflux have the symptoms because digestion proceeds poorly because of insufficient stomach acid, and the gas pressure causing the content to reflux back into the lower esophagus. The solution is to help digestion proceed more normally rather than suppressing it further.

Are There Drawbacks to Just Treating Indigestion and Reflux Symptomatically?

While just trying to appease symptoms with acid reducing medications seems simple, it is not without long-term drawbacks. These include:

- Fracture risk is increased 35-100% from poor mineral absorption
- Infection risk is increased for:
 - Pneumonia
 - Clostridia difficile
- Gastrointestinal infection risk with yeast, parasites or bacteria is increased
- B12 and other nutrient deficiencies resulting in anemia and increasing the risk of neuropathy
- IBS risk is increased
- 5-fold increased risk of stomach polyps

How to Sort through All of This and Find a Solution

Fortunately, an organized group of tests can help to determine if someone has hypochlorhydria, and if their symptoms actually come from poor digestion rather than from too much stomach acid. Very sensitive laboratory tests are now available to detect the presence of yeast, parasite or bacterial infections in the digestive tract which complicate the symptom picture.

How to Sort through All of This and Find a Solution

By following a logical pattern sorting through all of these issues, safe natural solutions with diet and nutritional supplements can be found for reflux and indigestion. The steps include:

- Test for infections
- Heal the stomach and esophagus linings
- Test digestion
- Correct digestive dysfunction
- Examine and correct the diet

Indigestion and reflux don't have to be an ongoing problem without a good solution. ♦

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