



ARE YOUR HEARTBURN PILLS HARMING YOUR HEALTH?

Taking medication for stomach acid could be a lot worse for you than you realise. *NH* investigates...

Late last year the story broke that proton pump inhibitors (PPIs), the commonly-prescribed drugs used to treat acid reflux, raise the risk of stomach cancer. A study published in the journal *Gut* found an association between long term usage and a 2.4 times higher risk of getting the disease. Thousands of people take these drugs, which include omeprazole and lansoprazole, each day in the UK – so just how risky are they?

“PPIs work by reducing the production of stomach acid,” says A Vogel nutritionist Alison Cullen (avogel.co.uk). “This is thought to be a good thing when dealing with acid reflux or inflammatory gastric conditions. The problem is that you need your stomach acid for several other purposes, such as breaking down proteins, absorbing iron, magnesium, calcium and vitamin B12.

Not getting enough of these vital nutrients can have far-reaching

consequences. “Low iron levels are obviously a problem as this can lead to lower levels of energy, especially if protein is also not being well absorbed,” says Alison. “The result of low magnesium levels is weak muscles, fatigue, cramping, irregular heartbeat, and problems absorbing calcium. Reports of low magnesium levels with PPI use have been reported. Ironically, one of the issues now recognised is that drugs for osteoporosis often cause heartburn, so PPIs are then

given to those patients, who need plenty of magnesium to help absorb calcium to protect their bones.”

So, if you suffer from indigestion and are taking a PPI, what should you do? Firstly, speak to your doctor. You should not come off any prescribed medicines without the advice of your healthcare team. “Next, discuss with your doctor what your options are,” advises Alison. “There might be other medicines that you could use for your digestive problem, but of course, the exact choice will depend on your individual circumstances.”

“Over the years, a number of herbal medicines have been authorised to treat symptoms of stomach and digestive upset, such as indigestion and bloating. For example, one traditional herbal medicine is Digestisan Oral Drops (£4.15, avogel.co.uk). It combines naturally sourced extracts of traditional herbal ‘bitters’ with peppermint to provide a convenient treatment for digestive upset. It is a traditional herbal medicinal product used for indigestion, the sensation of fullness and flatulence associated with over-indulgence in food or drink, or both, exclusively based upon long-standing use as a traditional remedy.”

And there’s more natural help for the problem. “Herbs can help soothe irritation caused by gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD),” says herbalist and naturopath Gabi Heyes who lectures for the College of Naturopathic Medicine (naturopathy-uk.com).

Good ones include slippery elm, liquorice, marshmallow or meadowsweet, which are herbs rich in ‘mucilage’, a thick substance which coats the tissues.

“What you eat needs to be broken down effectively, so consume small amounts of bitter food, which stimulates digestion: rocket, watercress, radish, chicory, celery and dandelion root coffee. As meals can backflow, sit upright at a table when eating, as slouching relaxes the ring of muscles that connects the stomach and oesophagus,” Gabi advises.

“Chew all food thoroughly and slowly, without drinking too much fluid. And avoid common triggers: dairy, gluten, chocolate, coffee, alcohol, fried foods, mint, citrus, tomatoes and spices.

“An amino acid called l-glutamine may help repair the mucosal lining of the oesophagus. Opt for slow-cooked vegetables, organic bone broth, grass-fed meats, olive oil, coconut oil, cooked apples, and if you’re OK with dairy, live yoghurt and kefir.

“Soil-based organisms are a type of probiotic that is well tolerated by GERD sufferers to re-establish the friendly bacteria in the bowel, which helps to rebalance the internal environment. And finally, ask your GP to rule out H. pylori, a hiatal hernia and whether your meds may be causing GERD.”

No one can deny that acid reflux is a truly awful condition to have but, as with so many medical problems, it is wise to explore every natural option, which may be gentler to the body, than rely solely on the pharmaceutical.

LOVE YOUR GUT

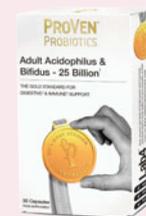
Look after the whole of your stomach with these wonder products



BetterYou Turmeric Spray, £17.95,
betteryou.com



Garden of Life Microbiome Formula Mood, £34.99,
kijaniliving.com



ProVen Probiotics Adult Acidophilus & Bifidus, £13.95,
provenprobiotics.co.uk



ASK THE EXPERTS

Don't suffer in silence – our wellbeing wonder-team of experts is on hand to answer your health questions

Tests have shown that I am starting to develop heart disease. What can I do about it?

Dr Sarah Myhill, a private medical practitioner (drmyhill.co.uk), says:

Heart disease is a term used to describe problems with the heart's rhythm, valves and muscle, and is often misused to refer to arterial disease. This is the most common heart problem and what I assume you have. If the heart is not supplied with enough blood then the delivery of oxygen is impaired which, in the short term, leads to lactic acid burn, also known as angina. A sudden blockage results in myocardial infarction – a heart attack.

The biggest causes of arterial damage are sugar and strain. These two are linked as a diet high in carbohydrates causes a spike in both blood sugar and adrenaline, and the latter leads to high blood pressure. We call this metabolic syndrome; a cluster of conditions that occur together and increase your risk of heart disease, stroke and diabetes.

Arterial disease can be reversed with a paleo-ketogenic diet and nutritional supplements. The low carb, high fat diet isn't easy to follow but it will reduce and stabilise your blood sugar levels. Sugar damages artery walls directly which is why diabetics have a high risk of arterial disease.

I think my cellulite has gotten worse recently and it's making me self-conscious. How can I get rid of it?

Georgios Tzenichristos, cellulite expert and director of Lipotherapeia (lipotherapeia.com), says:

Unless your cellulite is very mild or a recent development, you can't get rid of it completely despite what marketers would have you believe. You can significantly reduce it, however, through exercise and healthy eating. Lifestyle-wise, try to avoid sugar, alcohol, fried food, smoking and sitting at your desk for extended periods of time. Limiting your intake of refined carbohydrates and trans fats is also wise. Juices, oily fish, colourful complex carbs (such as black rice, red quinoa and kidney beans), salad, vegetables, green tea and a little avocado, on the other hand, will provide with lots of anti-cellulite nutrients, and a vegan or whey protein powder mixed with cacao and turmeric is good for added oomph.

In terms of exercise, interval swimming, running or cycling, uphill walking and vibration are the best types of physical activity for beating cellulite. Contrast showers on your legs and intensive kneading massage on your thighs will also help, but coffee scrubs and body brushing are a waste of time.

Finally, a high quality anti-cellulite cream containing lots of concentrated natural active ingredients is a must.

How can I boost my energy levels and avoid feeling blue and burnt out after the festivities?

Naturopath **Gemma Hurditch** lectures for CNM (College of Naturopathic Medicine naturopathy-uk.com) and says:

Swap tea, coffee, alcohol and sugary drinks for filtered water with a slice of cucumber or mint leaves, and opt for herbal teas such as nettle, ginger or dandelion to invigorate, nourish and cleanse. Fill up on fresh organic veg and ditch processed foods. It may help you to meet your minimum veg and fruit target of five a day if you invest in a high powered blender and experiment with smoothies. Raw beetroot, berries, and a small amount of chilli, water and ice make a delicious winter blend. Ensure a minimum of three vegetarian main meals per week. Natural endorphins from moderate exercise promote energy and immunity, and lift your mood so abandon your screens and at the very least take a brisk walk in the fresh air daily. A soak in an Epsom salts bath before bed promotes calm for a good sleep.