

Natural Remedies For Acid Reflux

Irritating at best and life-threatening at worst, Acid Reflux (also known as heartburn) is a common issue which can take a toll over time. In extreme cases, reflux can wear down tissues enough to allow infection to grow in the tissues. This can create ulcers and open a passage to the internal organs, blood system and brain. It is best to tend to reflux as soon as you have symptoms, as the GI tract responds well to early treatment.

Causes: the most common causes of acid reflux are lifestyle issues - poor diet and eating habits, chronic, unmanaged stress, excessive alcohol and coffee consumption, and medications which interfere with pH and/or enzymes of the stomach. Bacterial infection can also set into the stomach lining and contribute to chronic issues.

Symptoms:

- **Burning sensation in the esophagus** - this is caused by acid coming up the esophagus after eating, especially spicy or acidic foods
- **Gas or bloating** in your belly that puts pressure on the cardiac sphincter (valve between bottom of stomach and esophagus).
- **Excessive burping when eating**
- **Pain in and under the middle to left side of the bottom 2 ribs** (where the ribs meet the soft tissue of the belly)
- **Pain shooting towards the left arm** from the torso when you bend or lie down (*mimics symptoms of a heart attack*). When the pain is from reflux, sitting up straight or standing up will ease symptoms.
- **Bad taste in the mouth**
- **Chronic bad breath** (*halitosis*)
- **Low energy** - usually due to undigested food that's moved from the stomach into the intestines and cannot be absorbed into the bloodstream.
- **Symptoms worsen when lying down flat or bending over at the waist** and improve when you sit up or stand
- **Extremely foul smelling feces** which mimics rotting flesh of dead animals. This will occur when your body is unable to digest proteins and they ferment in the intestines.
- **In extreme cases**, when there is a bleeding ulcer, vomiting or spitting up bright red blood.

Remedies:

- **Reduce and manage stress:** See our website for ways to naturally manage your stress. (help yourself > stress management)
- **Stop drinking alcohol and coffee:** acidic foods (*coffee is extremely high in acid*) and alcohol destroy the mucosal lining of the stomach, leading to reflux and ultimately ulcers.
- **Reduce animal products and increase plant foods in your diet:** the stomach's primary job is to break protein into amino acids. By lowering protein intake (animal products are very high in poorly digestible protein), you reduce the stomach's workload. 3-5 grams of protein is the upper limit you should eat at one time in order to ease the workload of your stomach and allow it space and energy to heal. Adding plant-based foods adds both fiber and the vitamins and minerals and good fats needed to better digest all food.

- **Breathe:** Deep breathing pushes down on the cardiac sphincter causing it to close. This eases the effects of stress on the GI tract. Inhale deeply through your nose, pulling the air all the way into the bottom of your lungs. Exhale through the mouth. If you are not used to breathing this way, set a timer for a minute or two and practice. Eventually you will get used to it
- **Raw Honey and Apple Cider Vinegar:** Combine equal parts honey and apple cider vinegar **both raw and unpasteurized** and store in the refrigerator in a glass jar. You may adjust the quantity of the ingredients to make it palatable; the remedy will still be effective. Before all meals, mix about 2 tablespoons of the mixture in about $\frac{1}{3}$ cup of warm water and drink. If you have pain (or know you have ulcers) in the esophagus you cannot drink raw vinegar, but it comes in capsules/tablets in the health food stores and you can take a capsule when you drink the honey water. ***If you have blood sugar issues, lower the quantity of honey to $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp/dose, but use the full tablespoon of vinegar.***
- **Castor oil, arnica tincture, and a heating pad:** apply the oil and tincture over the ribs on the left side of the breastbone and place a heating pad or other heat source over the oil. Massage the area, starting at the bottom of the rib cage, rubbing towards the left and downward and continuing in a clockwise motion. This temporarily closes the valve and helps it to repair itself if caught early. Don't be afraid to use deep pressure and/or hold the area just below the left side of the ribs for a full minute when the pain is acute. This will also stop hiccups.
- **Eliminate and/or reduce high acid, spicy foods:** Until symptoms are better stay away from them completely. When you are doing better, add them back in small quantities in combination with other foods--never alone (strawberries, pineapple, tomatoes, green peppers, coffee, alcohol, chocolate, citrus--lemons, limes, grapefruits etc., fresh ginger)
- **Buffer foods:** raw honey, marshmallow, heavy cream, aloe vera are all foods which buffer the acidity of the stomach and/or absorb excessive acid in small quantities to relieve symptoms
- **Cayenne Pepper:** add cayenne as hot as you can stand it (either in powder when you eat or in capsule form) to all of your meals. Cayenne increases circulation to injured areas and closes broken blood vessels as it strengthens the vascular system overall.
- **Prickly pear/Nopal & Honey:** mix 1 to 2 capsules of prickly pear, $\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 teaspoons of raw honey, and a little warm water. Sip over the course of about 10 minutes. Do this twice a day between meals. You can use fresh nopal, capsules are just easier to find. Nopal/Prickly Pear herb/cactus is a stronger remedy than aloe vera.
- **Aloe Vera:** If you can't find nopal/prickly pear, use aloe vera gel or capsules as a substitute. It is easier to find, but not as effective.
- **Papaya:** Eat a small quantity of papaya with all meals. You can find it fresh, dried, juiced, or in tablets/capsules.
- **Slippery elm:** If your throat and esophagus are red/irritated/ulcerated from the effects of the acid, sipping a tea of $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. of slippery elm herb and a little honey will soothe those tissues. If you struggle with constipation, you will want to avoid the slippery elm herb.