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### *Ask the Natural Doc...*

I'm a 56 year old woman with terrible gastritis and stomach upset, my doctor has me on Prilosec. I'm having trouble sleeping due to burning acid reflux at night and I wake up nauseated and bloated...What else can I possibly do???

Dear Upset Stomach,

You are not alone. Gastritis affects about 20% of people in western countries and as a person ages that number raises to nearly 100% by age 70. Most common symptoms include abdominal pain and upset, gas, bloating, feeling of fullness, nausea and burning in the chest. In more extreme cases, symptoms such as bloody vomit or black stools present and more aggressive studies and treatment should be sought out.

I'm so glad you wrote in! There are a few issues pertaining to the commonly prescribed medications for gastritis that you and our readers should be aware of. Prilosec is in a family of medications called proton pump inhibitors (PPI's), which basically shut off acid production in the stomach. This works great for gastritis but the benefits come with risks. Without stomach acid your body isn't able to absorb important nutrients. Calcium is probably the most important for you because you're at an age where osteoporosis might be a health issue. Long term PPI use puts you at a higher risk for fractures. They also cause magnesium deficiencies, B12 deficiencies and leave you more vulnerable to infections (stomach acid is part of your immune system). Am I opposed to them? NO WAY! But I only prescribe them for short term use. My treatment strategy is to HEAL the stomach lining and rebuild the protective mucous barrier. Decreasing stomach acid is only part of the process.

First, let's assess your lifestyle. What are you eating? Consuming tobacco, alcohol, coffee, tea and spicy foods irritate the stomach lining. Next, what is your stress level? Stress causes an increase in the hormone "cortisol", which naturally decreases the protective mucous lining of the stomach. A blood test can determine if your cortisol levels are high. What about H.Pylori, a bacteria that causes ulcers and gastritis? You can take a simple breath test to rule this out and it can be cured with antibiotic. Are you taking any NSAID's (ibuprofen, naproxen, aspirin, etc.)? These over the counter medications decrease the stomach's mucous lining and cause ulcers.

I know what you're thinking...Do I have to eliminate all the tastiest foods and beverages? Yes! Unfortunately the stomach just can't heal if you don't tidy up the diet and manage high stress and cortisol. Exercise, especially yoga, is fabulous for stress reduction. Herbs like Ashwagandha and Magnolia bark extract along with Phosphatidylserine are scientifically proven to decrease cortisol levels.

After we clean up the diet, manage stress and evaluate your current medication list, we can start healing the stomach. Our focus here is to rebuild a healthy mucous lining that prevents stomach acid from causing inflammation. There are several natural and effective options available to rebuild healthy mucus lining. My favorites are Slippery Elm Bark, Marshmallow Root Extract and Aloe Vera juice. I start

patients on high doses of these herbals 3x/day while on the PPI medication for 1-2 weeks, then taper down the PPI over the next 2-4 weeks. Keep in mind there is a natural rebound of acid production when stopping a PPI, but that goes away quickly and the herbal medicines help minimize discomfort. Also, Ginger tea or capsules are great for relieving nausea and stimulating digestion. Initially, this would be a good option for you. In my office I use a product that combines all the above herbals with a gentle digestive enzyme called Papain, fiber and probiotics (healthy gut bacteria) to help improve overall digestion while healing the stomach and intestines. In my experience this approach works every time but treatment time does vary. Patients with severe symptoms that have gone untreated for an extended period of will need more time to heal.

Most health problems take years to become apparent and are heavily influenced by diet and lifestyle. It's unreasonable to expect overnight results without making some changes. Remember, stomach acid isn't "bad", it's needed to absorb vitamins and contributes to your immune system. The key is creating a healthy mucous barrier to protect the stomach from the acidic environment. I'm happy to offer you options to heal your stomach in ways that will not cause unfortunate side-effects and will contribute to your overall health...and it only takes a few "ohms" and a trip to the health food store!

Yours in Health,

Dr. Alexis McNeil, NMD



Inspired by her mother's battle with breast cancer, Dr. McNeil changed career paths from artist/designer to physician. It was Naturopathic Medicine that extended her mother's life and enlightened Dr. McNeil to her passion for healing.

Upon earning her medical degree from Southwest College of Naturopathic Medicine, Dr. McNeil completed a 2 year residency in Acute Family Medicine and Women's Health at Centro De Salud Familiar in downtown Phoenix, AZ. As a physician she has remained true to her artistic talents by incorporating cosmetic injections into her practice, truly *treating women inside and out*. Together with her husband, Dr. Jason McNeil, they formed North Valley Medical Center; a full service primary care clinic dedicated to compassionate patient centered care. Out of the office you will find Dr. Alexis with her family and friends, doing yoga, enjoying good healthy organic food and wine, or hiking with her dogs.

Feel free to email questions/comments to [dralexis@nvmedicalcenter.com](mailto:dralexis@nvmedicalcenter.com)