

## Acid drops

Achlorhydria is the technical name for low stomach acidity. It is very common in older people, increasing as we age. It can also result from taking antacids, and from various medications. If you've had acid reflux, you might think that neutralising stomach acid is a good thing. But it's not.

Stomach acid is a real protector, as well as being an indispensable part of your digestion. The acid is part of your immune system, killing off bacteria that may be in your food, or ingested by licking your fingers. Acid is also needed to break down proteins into peptides and then amino acids. If you don't break down protein, you can get all sorts of symptoms, including depression, as the vital amino acids tyrosine, tryptophan and phenylalanine are excreted instead of being absorbed.

It doesn't stop there either. Other nutrients, such as vitamin B<sub>12</sub> (a deficiency can cause irreversible neuropathy, or lack of feeling in the hands and feet), calcium, iron and zinc all fail to be absorbed.

What thrives in low stomach acidity is *Helicobacter pylori*, a nasty little bug which inflames your gut lining, and causes peptic ulcers. Bacterial overgrowth can also occur, giving you bad breath, bloating and other painful or embarrassing symptoms. Lack of B<sub>12</sub> and iron can both cause different types of anaemia, so you could be very tired and pale as well.

How do you know if you've got achlorhydria? Well, frequent burping is one of the main symptoms. Others include gastric pain, bad breath, indigestion, fatigue and mood changes. If you're over fifty, you can bet your acid levels are gradually getting lower.

Treatment is fairly simple. There are practitioner supplements designed to bump up your stomach acid levels. If stress is a problem, then rather than taking antacids, stress management is a better tool to keep acid reflux under control, along with a gut repair formula. Most of these contain slippery elm, which is a great healing and coating herb that helps rebuild and protect the gut walls.

After that, associated conditions, such as osteoporosis, anaemia, depression and gut dysbiosis can all be treated with diet and supplements, and in most cases, this should deal with the problems. However, it's important not to self-medicate, but to see a professional for a thorough assessment.

© Patrice Connelly

B. Nat Therapies, Adv. Dip. Naturopathy

[Advice in these columns is of a general nature only and is not to be taken as specific treatment.]