



Reigning in Reflux

Do some foods give you heartburn? If so, you are not alone: it is estimated that 1/3 of Americans get heartburn frequently. Chronic heartburn is called GERD, or Gastro-Esophageal Reflux Disease, and is caused by acidic content from the stomach leaking backwards into the esophagus.

The most common symptoms are a burning sensation above the stomach, excessive salivation, belching, regurgitation and a sour taste in the mouth. Less common symptoms are coughing, difficulty swallowing, hoarseness or change in voice, and sore throat. Heartburn is often worsened by bending, stooping or lying down; by eating, and is often worse at night. It is typically relieved by antacids.

GERD is most often treated with acid blocking medications. Proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) are the most potent; examples include Prilosec, Prevacid, Protonix and Nexium. The other popular type of medication are the H2 antagonists like Pepsid, Tagamet and Zantac. Even though these medications are very effective in stopping heartburn, it's best to develop a strategy to get off of them as soon as you can.

Here is the dilemma: neutralizing stomach acid stops heartburn and reduces the damage of acid in the esophagus, *but* there are long term effects. Less acid in the stomach alters digestion and affects the absorption of minerals. Recent studies have found an increased risk for fractures with PPIs – probably due to a decreased ability to absorb calcium. Rather than just relying on medications, make diet and lifestyle changes to lessen reflux.

Stress and overweight are significant contributors. The GI physicians I work with think that obesity is the leading cause of reflux: one more reason to pay attention and make healthy food choices! Exercise helps with stress management, weight management and aids digestion. If you suffer from reflux, bump up your activity level! It can only help.

Lifestyle changes can help: avoid large meals or overeating; make mealtimes relaxed for better digestion; eat less fat and greasy foods; avoid tight clothing which adds pressure; avoid stooping or bending – especially after meals; don't lie down for 3-4 hours after eating; keep a straight posture; raise the head of your bed about six inches; and don't smoke.

Everyone is different, but foods that are common offenders include peppermint and spearmint, chocolate, alcohol, caffeine, carbonated beverages, citrus, tomatoes and spicy foods. Try eliminating these for a few weeks and see if it helps. Keep in mind that quantity can make a difference.

Interestingly, too little stomach acid can also cause heartburn. Low stomach acidity allows bacteria to colonize and produce

gases and fatty acids which increases pressure on the valve between the stomach and esophagus.

The bottom line? Weight loss is the best long term treatment for heartburn, along with stress management. Diet and lifestyle adjustments can make a big difference. There is so much you can do! These suggestions are just the beginning; hopefully they'll help you get started!

How Friendly is Alcohol?

There is clear evidence that alcohol reduces the risk for heart disease, and slightly reduces the risk of type 2 diabetes and Alzheimer's, *when consumed in moderation*. Possible mechanisms include its effects on reducing inflammation, thinning blood and reducing clotting. And, it can help reduce stress.

But don't celebrate by opening a bottle yet—the news is not all good. Alcohol increases blood pressure, triglycerides and belly fat. Even in moderation it increases the risk of breast cancer in particular, and other cancers to a lesser degree.

Moderate consumption is considered one drink per day for women, and two per day for men. The standard measurement for one drink is 12 oz beer, 5 oz wine or 1.5 oz of spirits.

When consumption is higher than moderate, any benefits are lost and risks increase for gout, cancers, pancreatitis, gastritis and liver disease. It also affects the absorption of nutrients.

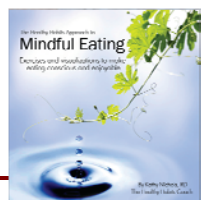
If you don't already drink, don't start just because of the possible benefits to your heart. If you do drink, it appears safe to enjoy as long as you keep it moderate. Saving up the weeks quota for the weekend is not moderation. I think it is wise to drink a few times a week, but not daily, and to watch your serving sizes. Besides, those calories add up!

Recipe for the Month

Fresh Apricot Chipotle Chutney

Kathy's Favorite Grilled Chicken Recipe

Click the links to the recipe, or find them on my blog at www.HealthyHabitsCoach.wordpress.com.



Mindful Eating CD

Learn more about mindful eating and try out the helpful exercises and visualizations with my new Mindful Eating CD. The CD is for sale on my website: HealthyHabitsCoach.com

Kathy Nichols: Life Coach & Registered Dietitian

Are you ready to stop dieting and looking for a way of eating that is sustainable, enjoyable and healthy?

Discover Wellness from the Inside Out!

