Long Term Use of Antacid Medications Can Cause an Increased Risk for Osteoporosis and Much More

By: Jeremie Pederson D.C., C.S.C.S.

Many people are concerned about the FDA news release dated May 25, 2010 titled Possible Fracture Risk with High Dose, Long-term Use of Proton Pump Inhibitors. The article warns consumers that long term use greater than one year’s duration at high doses has been associated with increased risk of fractures in multiple locations. The article does not quantify what high doses are, nor does it explain the physiology behind the findings.

Antacid medications try to block the production of hydrochloric acid from parietal cells in the stomach lining. If a patient is suffering from an ulcer or heart burn, they will usually find relief from blocking the production of stomach acid. The rationale for designing these types of drugs makes sense and was developed with good intentions to help patients suffering from heart burn. What the manufacturers may not have taken into account was that doctors and patients who are uneducated on the benefits of stomach acid would improperly use these drugs on a long term basis.

Many cases of acid reflux are actually caused by too little stomach acid being produced. Without adequate acid production food will not breakdown and move out of the stomach at a normal rate. This can cause food and stomach acid to back up into the esophagus. This creates the burning sensation felt by most patients, hence the reason why antacid medications were developed. With adequate acid production most symptoms can be eradicated. Listed below are the main functions of stomach acid:

• Helps breakdown large food particles into smaller units for better absorption
• Activates enzymes to breakdown proteins and fat in the stomach
• Assists in killing harmful bacteria, fungus, viruses, and parasites that may live on the food we eat
• Stimulates the gallbladder to contract releasing bile, which is essential to digest fats
• Signals the gastrointestinal tract to begin moving so that digestion and absorption can occur properly
• Allows our bodies to absorb vitamins and minerals
• Reduces intestinal irritation and decreases risks of developing food sensitivities by decreasing the amount of undigested foods that sit and putrefy in our intestinal tracts
Listed below are some of the most common nutrient deficiencies that develop from having low stomach acid:

- **B12 deficiency symptoms**: Increased homocysteine which increases risk for stroke, anemia, ulcerations, gastritis, muscle pains, neuropathies, depression, weight loss, decreased energy

- **Folic acid deficiency symptoms**: Increased homocysteine which increases risk for stroke, diarrhea, gingivitis, ulcers, anemia, decreased platelet production, depressed immune function, nervous system defects in a developing fetus, restless leg syndrome

- **Iron deficiency symptoms**: Low energy, weakness, ashy skin, functional hypothyroid condition, brittle nails, weak hair or hair loss, decreased immune function, headaches, glossitis, sore tongue, and increased risk of tearing tendons and ligaments by defective collagen production

- **Zinc deficiency symptoms**: Increased infections, swollen prostate glands, improper scar tissue formation, weight loss, hypogonadism, decreased smell and taste sensations, increased risk of developing cataracts, infertility, bone loss

- **Calcium deficiency symptoms**: Bone loss, low blood pressure, muscle spasms, weakness, tooth cavities, abnormal nerve sensations, tetany, convulsions, and headaches

- **Copper deficiency symptoms**: Decreased skin pigmentation, anemia, decreased immune function, bone loss, lethargy, abnormal scar tissue and/or weak connective tissue, and decreased iron absorption

- **Protein deficiency symptoms**: Shock occurs more quickly with burns and injuries, weight loss, dry skin, increased illnesses, slow healing time, swelling of lower extremities, fatigue, possible bloated belly with skinny arms and legs

Below is a list of diseases and conditions that could develop due to low stomach acid:

- Addison’s disease
- Arthritis/ rheumatoid arthritis
- Asthma
- Autoimmune diseases
- Celiac disease
- Cholangitis
- Cholecystitis
- Chronic sinusitis
- Dermatitis
- Depression
- Diabetes mellitus
- Eczema
- GERD (acid reflux)
- Gastric ulcers
- Gastritis
- Graves disease
- H. pylori
- Hepatitis
- Hypothyroid
- Psoriasis
- Herpes
- Hives
- Hyperthyroid
- Hypothyroid
- Laryngitis
- Lupus erythematosus
- Megaloblastic anemia
- Microcytic anemia
- Myasthenia gravis
- Osteopenia
- Osteoporosis
- Pernicious anemia
- Psoriasis
- Roseacea
- Sjögren’s disease
- Ulcerative colitis
- Urticaria
What should I do if I have reflux?

If you are suffering from acid reflux you should be evaluated by a qualified health care practitioner who is open minded to using vitamin and herbal therapies. There are many simple and complex tests to determine if a person is not producing adequate stomach acid. There are multiple treatment options that utilize natural acid, vitamins, herbs, and food in order to restore normal gastric function. There are some conditions that require antacid medications, but successful protocols exist to utilize ingested acids during meal times. This allows for proper digestion during meals while avoiding excessive acid production when not eating.

Overall, very few people need antacid medications to solve their digestive reflux symptoms, and most people should therefore think twice about using these medications on a long term basis. Of course, there are always exceptional situations where patients will never develop any side effects or conditions from taking antacid medications on a long term basis. Unfortunately for most of us, this will not be the case.
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