

HYPOCHLORHYDRIA – Low Stomach Acid

An estimated 30% of North Americans have low acidity. Natural aging, a poor diet, chronic use of certain medications, and past infection with the *Helicobacter pylori* bacteria can impair the stomach's ability to produce acid.

Stomach acid, technically known as hydrochloric acid, is essential for proper functioning of the digestive system. It activates digestive enzymes that break down food into small particles for absorption. Low acidity may result in only partial digestion of foods, leading to gas, bloating, belching, diarrhea or constipation. Gastric cancer is also linked to too little stomach acid as it create inflammatory changes in the stomach lining and a condition called chronic atrophic gastritis, which over time often leads to cancer.

Normal levels of stomach acid help to keep the digestive system free of bacteria, yeasts and parasites. With low acidity and the presence of undigested food, bacteria are more likely to colonize the stomach or small intestine and interfere with the digestion and absorption of protein, fat and carbohydrates.

Many vitamins and minerals require proper stomach acid in order to be properly absorbed, including magnesium, zinc, calcium, iron, vitamin B12, and folic acid.

Signs and Symptoms of Low Acidity

- Bloating, belching, and flatulence immediately after meals
- Indigestion, diarrhea, or constipation
- Soreness, burning or dryness of the mouth
- Heartburn
- Multiple food allergies
- Feeling nauseous after taking supplements
- Rectal itching
- Weak, peeling and cracked fingernails
- Redness or dilated blood vessels in the cheeks and nose
- Adult acne
- Hair loss in women
- Iron deficiency
- Undigested food in the stools
- Chronic yeast infections
- Low tolerance for dentures

Are You Confused?

Are you confused about pH? A healthy acid/alkaline balance of your body is the key to great health. When your body is functioning in top form, the digestive tract alternates back and forth between an alkaline and acid pH. Digestion starts in the mouth (which works optimally at an alkaline pH). Moving downwards, digestion in the stomach requires an acid pH. Next, the small intestines need an alkaline pH. Finally the large intestine works best in a slightly acid pH. If any segment fails to keep its proper pH, then the segment before or after it can begin to malfunction. For example, the stomach works best at a low acid pH. If the stomach can't produce enough stomach acid, then it becomes too alkaline. This in turn, can cause the small intestines (which should be alkaline) to become too acid.

For many people, as they get older, the parietal cells in the stomach lining produce less and less hydrochloric acid. This is especially true of those who eat: 1) heavily cooked foods (which have no live enzymes), 2) difficult-to-digest foods such as red meat or fried foods, 3) chemicalized foods, such as those containing artificial preservatives and additives, 4) soft drinks, which contain high amounts of phosphorus, white sugar, and immune-stressing chemicals and 5) barbecued foods, which cause high digestive stress. (The blackened areas of the food contain carcinogenic [cancer-causing] agents.)

TAKE THE HCL CHALLENGE

This simple test can help you determine whether you have the appropriate level of hydrochloric acid in your stomach for optimal digestion. Don't do this test however, if you have ulcers.

Instructions:

Begin by taking 1 capsule of betaine hydrochloride (BH) before your largest meal of the day. I recommend Betaine HCL from Douglas Labs and you can purchase this through my online store accessible through www.clearmedicine.com.

You should feel a burning or warming sensation in your stomach or upper abdomen, which indicates you have enough HCL and you can stop taking the pills. You may also feel slightly "acidic," as though you have indigestion, which also means you probably have enough stomach acid.

If you don't feel anything after taking the BH, repeat the process the following day with 2 pills before your largest meal. If you feel the warming or burning sensation, take only 1 pill the next day. Keep doing this daily until the warming sensation returns. You can then stop taking the pills. You may choose to continue supplementing at each meal (3 times a day) with a digestive enzyme that contains HCL along with enzymes. Choices include: Metagest (Metagenics); Ultra Digestive Enzymes (Dougals Labs) - these are also available through the clearmedicine online store.

www.thehormonediet.com

Note: You should feel something after taking one or two pills – this is normal. If you must increase the dosage beyond this point, your stomach acid level is too low. Then your aim is to discover just how low, so keep going...

If you do not feel anything after 2 pills, take 3 pills the next day before your largest meal. If you feel the burning or warming sensation, take 2 pills the next day and remain at two pills until you feel the sensation return, then drop to 1 pill the day after that. Remain at one until the sensation returns again, then stop.

If you do not feel anything at three pills, keep increasing each day until you reach a maximum of 10 pills. Keep taking 10 pills (i.e., 5 before and 5 after beginning to eat your largest meal) until you feel a sensation – then drop down to 9, 8, 7 and so on, as outlined above. Be patient and stick with it. Correcting a hydrochloric acid deficiency may take a few weeks or even months.

Your goal is to gradually grow accustomed to the HCL capsules and then wean yourself off the capsules once the proper acid level has been restored. This process will ensure you have just the right amount of stomach acid – not too much and not too little – for excellent nutrient absorption, one of the key secrets to looking and feeling your best every day.