

# Treat Heartburn and GERD Naturally

## KEY WORDS

heartburn, acid reflux, gastroesophageal reflux, GERD, antacids, omeprazole, lansoprazole, esomeprazole, cimetidine, ranitidine, LES, lower esophageal sphincter, sea buckthorn berry, D-limonene, hyperacidity, leaky gut

Almost everyone has experienced heartburn. Usually, the first thing a person does to stop the pain is reach for a couple of antacids. It's almost a trained response; we've all seen the commercials on TV telling us why stomach acid is the culprit behind acid reflux, and the best thing to do is eliminate it as quickly as possible.

Actually, that's about the *worst* thing you could do.

## We need stomach acid

Without it, we risk broken bones, food poisoning, infections, and even pneumonia, in addition to not being able to digest food properly. But that doesn't mean you have to suffer with the pain, and even worse, esophageal damage, from heartburn. There are effective natural ingredients that can stop the burn, and soothe the digestive system, *without* interfering with stomach acid. In this [Terry Talks Nutrition](#), we're going to talk about botanical solutions to the growing concern of heartburn.

## What causes the fire?

While it isn't immediately life-threatening, the pain from heartburn can be so severe that sometimes people mistake it for a heart attack. The "burn" is caused by stomach acids overflowing from the stomach into the esophagus. This is usually because of a one-way valve called the lower esophageal sphincter (LES). This valve allows food to enter the stomach from the esophagus, but keeps the stomach contents from coming back up into the esophagus. When the LES opens at the wrong time, or doesn't close properly, the acidic digestive juices in the stomach splash onto the unprotected lining of the esophagus, causing the characteristic "burn" of heartburn.

Of course, heartburn is one thing, but gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) is another, more serious condition. When stomach acid

repeatedly washes up into the delicate structures of the esophagus it causes real damage over time, destroying the mucosal lining – possibly leading to ulcers. Even worse, chronic irritation of the lower end of the esophagus may lead to a pre-cancerous condition called Barrett's esophagus, which in turn can lead to cancer. In fact, it has been estimated that people with Barrett's esophagus have **40 times** the risk of esophageal cancer as those without this problem. Therefore, it is important to eliminate chronic heartburn for more reasons than merely reducing occasional discomfort.

People with GERD may have other symptoms as well, including chronic coughing, wheezing and regurgitation of food. And unfortunately, the billion dollars a year that Americans spend for antacid products to treat their heartburn and GERD not only won't help – they are making the problem worse!

## Stomach acid is *not* the enemy

While many manufacturers promote and sell products that reduce stomach acid as a way to treat heartburn, these products are not the solution. Although they may – temporarily – stop the pain of heartburn, interfering with the body's production of stomach acid does not help the underlying processes that lead to heartburn in the first place. In fact, reducing stomach acid causes a whole new set of problems.

Normally, when the contents of the stomach are properly acidified, the pyloric valve at the lower end of the stomach opens, allowing stomach contents to move into the duodenum, the first section of the intestines, where digestion continues and absorption of nutrients begins.

However, if stomach acid levels are low, it takes a *lot longer* for the stomach's contents to ferment, and that causes gas that presses against the esophageal valve. Over time, the valve weakens and the acidified contents of the stomach spill back into the esophagus, causing the pain of heartburn, and over time, the potential complications of GERD.

## Reducing stomach acid is not the answer

The reason why antacids and drugs that reduce acid production *appear* to work is because, as they neutralize stomach acids, the pyloric valve opens too quickly and allows the not fully-

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processed stomach contents into the duodenum. Because the stomach empties faster, there is less chance of the contents escaping back up into the esophagus. Plus, anything that does back up is less acidic, and less irritating to the esophagus. So why is this bad? There are some important reasons:

- Proteins that were supposed to be broken down in the stomach are now in the intestines, and could actually act as an allergen. This may contribute greatly to leaky gut syndrome and irritable bowel.
- Protein not being broken down properly means that calcium and iron aren't being absorbed properly either. In fact, use of acid inhibiting drugs has been associated with a **25% increased risk** of bone fracture.
- Harmful bacteria that could have been destroyed by stomach acids now have a "free pass" into the intestines, where they could do much more harm. Particularly dangerous bacteria called *Clostridium difficile* have been found to cause infections much more often in people who use acid blocking drugs.
- Neutralizing stomach acids with antacids (Rolaids, Tums, Maalox, Mylanta, etc) causes a rebound effect in which the body in turn OVER produces acid to compensate for the lack of acid in the stomach where it is needed.
- A new study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) shows

*More...*

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that if you go into a hospital and are prescribed Prilosec (omeprazole), Nexium (esomeprazole) or Prevacid (lansoprazole) – all drugs that greatly reduce acid production – you have a **30% increased risk** for contracting pneumonia during your stay. [Shoshana J. Herzig, Michael D. Howell, Long H. Ngo, Edward R. Marcantonio. Acid-Suppressive Medication Use and the Risk for Hospital-Acquired Pneumonia. *JAMA*. 2009 May. 301(20):2120-2128.]

Fortunately, there are ingredients that help relieve and prevent heartburn naturally, without interfering with normal, healthy stomach acidity!

## Natural ingredients work with your body – not against it!

**D-limonene.** One of the best natural ingredients to fight heartburn and GERD is D-limonene. This clinically studied component of citrus oil is found in the peels of oranges, grapefruits, lemons and limes. Although citrus fruits are typically associated with *causing* heartburn, D-limonene has been shown to help stop it.

In one study, 19 adults with a history (at least 5 years) of mild to moderate symptoms of heartburn or GERD were asked to discontinue their over the counter (OTC) or prescription medications and take D-limonene instead. Initially, many of the participants rated their pain on a scale of 1 to 10, (1 meaning pain free, and 10 equaling severe pain) at 5 or greater. By the **second day** of taking D-limonene, 32 percent of the participants experienced symptom relief, rating at 1 or 2. After 14 days, 89 percent of the participants were symptom free!

In a double-blind, placebo-controlled study, 13 participants followed the same symptom severity scale, and by the fourth day, 29 percent in the D-limonene group experienced significant relief (a 1 to 2 rating), versus zero in the placebo group. By day 14, 86 percent of the D-limonene group reported complete relief.

Studies on D-limonene and heartburn are continuing, as greater awareness of this powerful intervention increases. Scientists suggest that it coats and protects the stomach walls and mucosa from the potential damage of stomach acid (without interfering with acid production), and supports healthy peristalsis – the muscle action of the intestines that moves food through the digestive system. This allows the stomach and esophagus to heal, and promotes better stomach

emptying and more normal digestive processes.

**Sea Buckthorn Berry.** Sea Buckthorn (*Hippophae rhamnoides*), another important botanical ingredient for heartburn and GERD, works in a different way. It has a protective effect on the stomach and actually helps prevent and heal gastric ulcers. It also soothes the protective lining of the digestive tract. Sea Buckthorn may not sound familiar to many, but this plant – naturally grown in northern Europe and Asia – has a thousand-year history in Tibetan and Mongolian medicine. The berry is so rich in benefits it has been called a “nutrient bomb”!

Not only does Sea Buckthorn include flavonoids, water and fat-soluble vitamins, and helpful plant lipids, it also contains fatty acids, including Omega 3, 6, 7, and 9. This amazing blend promotes the health and hydration of all mucous membranes in the body, including the mouth, eyes, and vaginal tissue. Sea Buckthorn is crucially important for healing the mucous membranes of the mouth, esophagus, stomach, and intestines. Mucous membranes are the first line of defense for the digestive system, and as a result, they’re often the first tissues to be affected when things begin to go wrong.

In fact, oils from the pulp and seeds of Sea Buckthorn showed protective and curative effects on four experimental models of gastric ulcers. Interestingly, it doesn’t seem that the fatty acid composition – so important for tissue health on the inside and outside of the body – is the sole reason for its anti-ulcer effects: the other nutrients, including beta-carotene, alpha-tocopherol, and beta-sitosterone, may be contributing just as much to the protection and healing.

When you look for these ingredients, make sure the Sea Buckthorn extract you find is rich in phytosterols, tocopherols and carotenoids, just like the material used in the studies. The oil in this extract should also be extracted in a specific ratio of berry pulp and seed oil, containing Omega 3, 6, 7 and 9. Additionally, look for a product that uses an environmentally-friendly, hand harvesting and solvent-free supercritical CO2 extraction technology. I prefer to use Sea Buckthorn oil that has been clinically studied.

## Additional things to remember about heartburn and GERD

Of course, if you have problems with recurring heartburn or suspect that you have GERD, there

are other lifestyle choices you must consider. If you smoke, stop. The benefits will far exceed stopping your heartburn, and you’ll be healthier and feel better overall. Avoid those deep-fried foods that can upset the stomach and cause inflammation throughout the body. And, consider eating smaller, more frequent whole food meals to avoid filling up all at once.

Pregnant women often complain of heartburn as the increasing size of the baby places unusual pressure on the stomach and its contents. After the child is born, this issue usually completely resolves. Pregnant women may not need any further intervention for their heartburn than eating smaller meals and elevating the head of the bed with some wood blocks to help prevent reflux. If heartburn persists, please check with your health care practitioner to decide if using this natural intervention is right for you.

Obesity, especially apple-shaped patterns of obesity, contributes greatly to heartburn and GERD, as the additional fat places undue pressure on the stomach. Losing even 5 or 10 pounds can improve heartburn and GERD risk.

## You don’t have to suffer

Heartburn and GERD are not only painful; they can be dangerous as the esophagus becomes damaged by excessive acid exposure. However, turning off the acid can do more harm than good. By avoiding acid-stopping OTC and prescription drugs, being smart about your diet and habits, and using high-quality D-limonene and Sea Buckthorn ingredients, you’ll give your body a chance to heal itself naturally. It’s a solution that simply makes good sense – for the long run. <sup>TM</sup>

**Terry recommends a product with these ingredients. Look for it at your local health food store.**

Proprietary Complex 600 mg  
D-Limonene, Sea Buckthorn (*Hippophae rhamnoides* L.) Oil (SBA 24) rich in phytosterols, tocopherols, tocotrienols and carotenoids; oil extracted in a specific ratio of berry pulp and seed oil, containing Omega 3, 6, 7 and 9 using supercritical CO2 extraction technology