

BETTER WAY TO BAN HEARTBURN

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Dear Pharmacist: I have had stomach problems for years with gas, bloating and heartburn. I am still not feeling well, despite taking Maalox, Zantac, Prilosec OTC and Nexium. How do all these medications work? - J.M., Madison, WI

Dear J.M.: Here's how medication works:

Antacids: These sop up the acid in your stomach like a sponge. They work quickly. Every medicine cabinet should stock an antacid like Mylanta, Maalox, Riopan or Tums.

H2 blockers: These reduce the amount of acid your body makes. They take more time to kick in, but work longer than antacids. The two most popular include Zantac (ranitidine) and Pepcid AC (famotidine).

Proton pump inhibitors: These drugs suppress acid 24/7 in people with peptic ulcer disease, Barrett's esophagus, Zollinger-Ellison syndrome and gastric tumors. Prilosec OTC (omeprazole) is sold over-the-counter. Prevacid, Aciphex and Nexium require prescriptions.

But do we need a pill? This mindset has been hammered into us thanks to aggressive marketing campaigns and television commercials. You need acid to digest your food.

Here are other great ways to restore health:

Probiotics: Replenish the friendly camp of beneficial organisms in your gut and crowd out disease-causing bacteria or yeast. These help you digest food so it may contribute to weight loss, stop the gas, and lower your risk for urinary tract or yeast infections. Quality supplements like Culturelle contain a well-studied and proven organism called Lactobacillus GG. Other good brands contain L. acidophilus, L. sporogenes and bifidobacterium.

Enzymes: These are naturally found in fresh, raw fruits and veggies, which help you break down your meals. Lipase breaks down fat; amylase breaks down carbs and lactase breaks down dairy foods. .

L-glutamine: A natural amino acid that nourishes and protects your gut lining. It helps digestive disorders including Crohn's, Celiac, irritable bowel syndrome and ulcerative colitis. It seems to soothe and heal ulcers by stimulating the production of healing mucoproteins. Dosage: 1-2 grams twice daily.