

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Too Much Acid?

It's pretty common for people to complain about having too much acid these days. GERD, or reflux, is a common problem. Sales of various over the counter medications to reduce the amount of acid just keep going up, and the old antacids are still going strong. So why not pop a pill to decrease your risk of heartburn? Actually there are a couple of reasons to be careful, one we've known about and another that's just being studied.

Acid in your stomach is a natural thing. Human stomachs are super-acidic places. The acid starts your digestion off, and helps your digestive enzymes work better. Acid also kills a lot of bacteria. Most of the time we don't know about or notice all that acid churning around down there. It's only when for some reason the acid squeezes past the top of our stomachs into the lower part of our throats that we feel it. Then we feel 'heartburn'. It's not our hearts, just our throats, but it certainly does burn.

Why does the acid get up there where we can feel it? Sometimes it's because we ate too much. Sometimes the muscles at the top of the stomach that are supposed to keep the 'door' shut get weak and stay open. Overweight people and people who lie down right after eating are more likely to feel it too. For whatever reason, it hurts.

So we take a pill to make it feel better. For years, what we took were antacids. Usually made of calcium, they simply neutralized the acid as it was made. Now we can choose among a number of medications that stop our stomachs from making acid.

But without acid more bacteria can manage to survive our stomachs and create problems. It's been known for years that people taking large doses of antacids are more likely to get food poisoning. That stomach acid was our first line of defense!

Now a recent study has shown that reducing the acid also reduces how much vitamin B-12 we can absorb from our foods. B-12 naturally comes tied to protein. It's only found in meats or foods from animal sources. To free the vitamin from the protein our bodies need a high-acid location - the

stomach. When we either neutralize the acid or don't make it at all, B-12 stays tied up and we can't absorb it.

Doctors compared the B-12 blood levels of over 200,000 people. Those who had been taking a type of medication to stop acid production, the PPIs (Nexium, Prilosec or Prevacid) 2 years or longer were much more likely to have low B-12 in their blood. One thing that surprised the doctors was that young people in their 30s were as likely as older people to have low B-12 in their blood.

Without enough B-12 we can't make enough red blood cells. The result is anemia. But B-12 also helps keep our nerves functioning. Without enough B-12 our hands and feet go numb, or tingle. Sometimes we get confused, depressed or more forgetful. It's also involved in making more DNA for new cells to repair injuries, line our intestines and replace our skin. It's pretty important!

The doctors who did the study do not recommend that we stop taking antacids or PPI medications. But they do encourage other doctors to be sure to check on their patients' B-12 levels, especially if they have been using the drugs for a long time.

We absorb synthetic vitamin B-12 better than the natural form. Synthetic B-12 is added to fortified cereals and other grain products. If it is added to the cereal it should be listed in the ingredient list, and the nutrition facts box on the label will show it. There should be at least 40% DV of B-12 in the facts box.

This recipe for chicken fingers uses corn flakes for extra crunch. Be sure to check the label and choose a fortified brand to get your B-12. You can make extras and freeze them before baking. Just put the frozen ones on a baking pan and bake for 25 minutes at 375° F for a quick dinner.

Crunchy Chicken Fingers

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| 1 C all-purpose flour | ¼ tsp each salt and pepper |
| 4 large egg whites (or ½ C + 1 Tbsp liquid egg) | ½ C fat free milk |
| 1½ C crushed corn flakes cereal | 1 C (4 oz) shredded low fat cheddar cheese |
| 1½ pounds boneless, skinless chicken breast | |

Cut chicken into strips 1 inch wide by 4 inches long. Crush cornflakes in sealed plastic bag to make 1½ C of crumbs. Preheat oven to 375° F. Coat baking sheet with cooking spray. Combine flour, salt and pepper in shallow bowl. Combine egg whites or liquid egg and milk in second bowl and whisk to combine. Combine crushed corn flakes and cheese in third shallow bowl. Dip chicken strips first in flour, then egg, then corn flakes, turning them over to coat all sides. Lay strips on baking sheet, not touching, and bake for 12 minutes, turn over and bake for 10-12 minutes longer. Serves 6.

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