

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Fighting Heartburn

From Tums® and Maalox® to the purple pills, people have been fighting heartburn for decades if not centuries. Treatment used to be very strict diets, which many patients did not or could not follow. Then came the spoonfuls of chalky white syrup, and chalky white pills. Now there are purple (and white and other) pills, so more than ever people ignore the diet and pop a pill. But with more use has come more concerns. Should you think twice before you pop the next pill?

Heartburn is a common name. It feels like your heart's on fire. But really it's the lower end of your throat, where food enters the stomach, that's causing the pain. GERD, for gastroesophageal reflux disease, is the diagnosis. What's happening is that stomach acid is bubbling back up from the stomach into the throat. The stomach is lined to protect itself from those digestive acids. The throat is not. So all the nerves are screaming at your brain.

There seem to be two main groups of food that trigger reflux. Limiting either one or both of them may well remove the pain or at least make it less bad. Some foods are likely to let the muscles around the top of the stomach relax. If they hang loose then acid can easily squirt back up into the throat. For most people these include fatty, greasy and fried foods, as well as alcohol and chocolates. So skip the drinks before dinner and keep the chocolate to a minimum. Switching your cooking from frying to baking, broiling and boiling will certainly help reduce the fat in your meals.

Cutting back on the fat will probably help reduce the heartburn in a second way too. For most people, losing weight will help. Fat piled up around our middles squeezes the stomach. That makes it more likely that acid will ooze back up into the throat too. So weight loss is almost always a good idea for people with GERD.

The other kinds of food that trigger reflux pain are acidic and spicy foods. These don't let acid leave the stomach, they just burn the nerves that have all ready been damaged by the acid. So skipping the OJ and lemonade, reducing the chilies in the bowl of hot red, and leaving the bottle of

Louisiana Hot Sauce in the cupboard will help.

Other common helps, before you get to the pills, include sitting up for at least 2 hours after a meal and before going to bed. This just physically helps keep the acid down in the stomach where it belongs. Stopping smoking is another big reliever for many people.

If the pain of GERD becomes bad enough, your doctor may well recommend medication, either over the counter or prescription. Many OTC meds neutralize acid. The prescription ones generally work by preventing your stomach from making as much acid. They are both quick ways to ease the pain.

But we need acid for digestion and absorption of many nutrients. There's growing concern that people who take the medications for a long time may not be able to absorb enough calcium or vitamin B-12 without the acid. We need calcium for bones and B-12 for our nerves and brain to function well. At least a few studies say that these medications may also interfere with some blood thinners.

Another job of all that acid in our stomachs is to kill bacteria that hitch rides in on food. People taking large doses of antacids or other GERD medications are more likely to suffer from some food poisoning bacteria, pneumonia and other gastrointestinal infections.

If you've been on these meds for a long time, talk to your doctor about if or how you might try to ease off of them. Watch your diet, work on your weight, stop smoking, and maybe you won't need them so often.

Here's a colorful and super-easy way to add more healthy nutrients to your menu. For the children, arrange some olive circles over the cheese to make a smiley face. They'll be delighted!

Cheesy Roasted Tomatoes

2 medium tomatoes (not plum)	4 fresh basil leaves, washed
2 Tbsp black olives, finely chopped	2 Tbsp grated Parmesan cheese
2 Tbsp shredded low fat mozzarella cheese	

Wash tomatoes and cut in half across the middle. Preheat broiler or toaster oven. Put tomatoes cut side up on broiler tray. Lay a basil leaf on each half. Divide cheeses and olives among the 4 halves on top of basil. Broil 2 minutes until cheese starts to brown. Let cool a little before serving. Serves 4.

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