

Digestion part 2: The Stomach: the Body's Blender
The Stomach: Acid Wanted
The Stomach: An Owner's Manual

Good digestion is the foundation of health and taking care of your digestive tract is the focus of the previous and next few articles in Green Medicine. In this article I will focus on the stomach, how it works, the issue of low stomach acid and how to take good care of it.

The stomach is a food storage and mixing organ. The two main goals of stomach function are to break food down into tiny particles and to control the flow of food into the small intestine. It secretes hydrochloric acid, the protein digesting enzyme pepsin, and a small amount of the fat digesting enzyme lipase. It is also very sensitive to emotions such as anxiety, anger and fear and often responds to these emotions by shutting down.

The stomach acts like a blender shaking and stirring our meal to start the breakdown process and create a food smoothie called chyme. We absorb the tiny food particles and use them to make energy and body parts. Food will stay in the stomach for 1- 4 hours depending on the type of food, the amount eaten in a meal and the emotional state of the owner.

The stomach also regulates the flow of the chyme into the duodenum, the first part of the small intestine. The stomach controls how much and how fast the food smoothie is released. Small amounts released frequently allow for good absorption. The speed at which the stomach empties is influenced by many factors. High fat meals, pain and anxiety will slow down emptying. Some things that stimulate a faster movement of food from the stomach are irritation, infection, and coffee. Emptying the stomach too quickly or too slowly can cause poor digestion.

One of the most common and often misunderstood health problems associated with the stomach is faulty hydrochloric acid secretion, or hypochlorhydria. HCl is a very important part of digestion and absorption. It breaks proteins down into their smaller parts, amino acids, and is required to absorb vital nutrients such as iron, calcium, magnesium, B vitamins, zinc and copper. It also kills bacteria and parasites that might be in the food we eat.

Some of the symptoms that occur with low gastric acidity are bloating, belching, burning or flatulence immediately after meals, indigestion, nausea after taking supplements, rectal itching, weak, peeling or cracked fingernails, dilated blood vessels in the cheeks and nose and undigested food

in the stool. There are also some very serious diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis, thyroid disease, gastric ulcer and cancer, iron deficiency anemia, osteoporosis and giardia which have been linked to low stomach acid.

What causes low stomach acid production? The list includes chronic stress, H. pylori infection, a diet high in refined foods, acid suppressing drugs, being Native American or Hispanic and getting older.

The good news is that you can support good HCl secretion by eating high fiber foods, managing stress and anxiety and relaxing while eating. Lemon water, vinegar and bitter foods also promote HCl secretion. Digestion is where it all begins so if you promote good digestion you are creating a healthy foundation for your whole body. Bon Appetite!!

"The first wealth is health." Ralph Waldo Emerson