

An overlooked cause of dyspepsia?

Discussion of a common cause of dyspepsia was missing from your September article, “Dyspepsia: A stepwise approach to evaluation and management” (*J Fam Pract.* 2021;70:320-325). After more than 25 years of practice, I have found that most people with dyspepsia have hypochlorhydria¹—a condition that results in the inability to produce adequate amounts of hydrochloric acid, or *stomach acid*. With lower amounts of stomach acid, food does not break down but ferments instead, producing gas and discomfort.

I use a simple test to diagnose patients with hypochlorhydria. The patient takes a capsule of hydrochloric acid directly after eating a meal; failure to experience epigastric burning within 30 minutes of ingesting the capsule indicates a need for additional stomach acid with a meal. If they do experience a burning sensation within 30 minutes, it indicates they do not need additional stomach acid. The burning sensation is relieved by drinking 2 teaspoons of baking soda in 4 oz of water to neutralize the excess acid.

In my experience, most people who take the test do not experience a sense of burning. I find that once these patients with hypochlorhydria start taking betaine hydrochloride with their meals, they no longer need the many over-the-counter or prescrip-

tion antacids and their dyspepsia disappears. Many of my patients find that after a few months, they begin to experience burning and can discontinue the supplement, without facing a return of their dyspepsia.

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Reference

1. Iwai W, Abe Y, Iijima K, et al. Gastric hypochlorhydria is associated with an exacerbation of dyspeptic symptoms in female patients. *J Gastroenterol.* 2012;48:214-221. doi: 10.1007/s00535-012-0634-8

Editor's note

After reading Dr. Rothschild's letter, I decided to do a little digging to find out if there is any research evidence to support her approach to dyspepsia. I carefully searched PubMed and found only 2 observational studies showing an association between dyspepsia and hypochlorhydria. There are no randomized trials of dyspepsia treatment with hydrochloric acid to support her clinical observations. Placebo effect? Until there is a good, randomized trial, we will not know. But who would have guessed that *H pylori* causes peptic ulcers?

JFP

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References

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2. Gorski D. Functional medicine: the ultimate misnomer in the world of integrative medicine. Science-Based Medicine. April 11, 2016. Accessed January 4, 2022. <https://sciencebasedmedicine.org/functional-medicine-the-ultimate-misnomer-in-the-world-of-integrative-medicine/>
3. The Institute for Functional Medicine. Accessed January 4, 2022. <https://www.ifm.org>