

Getting Well Naturally - Gastritis

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Gastritis is an inflammation of the lining of the stomach. There are many possible causes of this disorder including an infection, an irritant, an autoimmune disorder, or a backup of bile into the stomach. The stomach lining may be "eaten away," leading to sores (peptic ulcers) in the stomach or first part of the small intestine. Left untreated, these ulcers may bleed. Gastritis can also be caused by a blood disorder called pernicious anemia. Gastritis can occur suddenly (acute gastritis) or gradually (chronic gastritis). In most cases, gastritis does not permanently damage the stomach lining and sometimes no specific cause of the inflammation is identified.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS:

The most common symptoms of gastritis are stomach upset and pain. The following are other symptoms of gastritis:

- Indigestion (also called dyspepsia)
- Heartburn
- Abdominal pain
- Hiccups
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Vomiting, possibly of blood (called hematemesis) or material that looks like coffee-grounds
- Dark stools

Infections can be any of the following types:

- Bacterial (usually *Helicobacter pylori*)
- Viral (including herpes simplex virus)
- Parasitic
- Fungal

Irritation can be caused by a number of things, such as the following:

- Long-term medication use (for example, aspirin, ibuprofen or other anti-inflammatory drugs [called

- NSAIDs])
- Alcohol use
- Cigarette smoking
- Chronic vomiting
- Coffee and acidic beverages
- Excess gastric acid secretion (such as from stress)
- Eating or drinking caustic or corrosive substances (such as poisons)
- Trauma (for example, radiation treatments or having swallowed a foreign object)



PREVENTIVE CARE: Making lifestyle changes, such as avoiding the long-term use of irritants (aspirin, anti-inflammatory drugs, coffee, and alcohol) will go a long way to preventing gastritis and its complications like an ulcer. Stress reduction through relaxation techniques including yoga, tai chi, and meditation can also be quite helpful.

The cure for gastritis caused by ingesting irritating substances is to stop the long-term use of these substances, which may include:

- Alcohol
- Tobacco
- Acidic beverages such as coffee (both caffeinated and decaffeinated), carbonated beverages, and fruit juices with citric acid
- NSAIDs, such as aspirin and ibuprofen – switch to other pain relievers (like acetaminophen)
- Eat a fiber-rich diet
- Avoid high fat foods (at least from animal studies, high fat foods increase inflammation in the stomach lining)

NUTRITION AND DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS:

Eating a diet high in fiber may not only cut your risk of developing ulcers in half, but fiber-rich foods may also speed the healing of ulcers. Fruits and vegetables are particularly protective sources of fiber

and seem to reduce the amount of inflammation in the lining of the stomach; fruit juice appears to have this benefit as well. Plus, if you didn't have enough reasons to avoid fat in your diet already, animal studies suggest that high fat foods may lead to gastritis.

Consumption of foods and beverages that irritate the lining of the stomach or increase the stomach acids should be avoided completely or reduced, and known allergens eliminated. These often include:

- Alcohol
- Acidic drinks such as coffee (with and without caffeine)
- Milk
- Carbonated beverages
- Spices and peppers (for some people this is important, while for others such foods do not seem to cause symptoms or inflammation)

GAMMA-LINOLENIC ACID (GLA): Very preliminary evidence from studies suggest that gamma-linolenic acid (GLA) from evening primrose oil (EPO) may have anti-ulcer properties. GLA is an essential fatty acid (EFA) in the omega-6 family that is found primarily in plant-based oils, including EPO and borage seed oil. Although studies are promising, it is too early to know how this might apply to people with gastritis.

Probiotics: Healthy or "friendly" organisms, called probiotics, inhabit the lining of the intestines and protect us from the entrance of "bad" infections that can cause disease. *Lactobacillus acidophilus* (*L. acidophilus*) is the most commonly used probiotic. In test tube studies, *L. acidophilus* and other probiotics were able to kill or slow down the growth of *H. pylori*. One way in which probiotics may help is by reducing side effects, such as diarrhea and taste

disturbance, from medications used to treat *H. pylori*.

VITAMIN B12: People with pernicious anemia and *H. pylori* infection are deficient in vitamin B12. Supplementation with this vitamin may be used to treat both. Good dietary sources of vitamin B12 include fish, dairy products, organ meats (particularly liver and kidney), eggs, beef, and pork.

OTHERS: The following appear promising, but more research is needed before these nutrients become a part of treatment for gastritis, its symptoms, or its complications:

Bromelain (*Ananas comosus*) -- the protein-digesting enzymes found in bromelain (derived from pineapple) help promote and maintain proper digestion and may relieve symptoms of stomach upset or heartburn, particularly when used with other enzymes such as amylase (which digests starch) and lipase (which digests fat).

Vitamin A: Found in many fruits and vegetables, is thought to increase the benefit of these foods (which are also rich in fiber as discussed earlier).

Vitamin C: In one study, high-dose vitamin C treatment for four weeks effectively treated *H. pylori* infection in some, but not all, people. In addition, *H. pylori* appears to impair absorption of vitamin C, which may play a role in the higher risk of stomach cancer for those with this organism in their gastrointestinal tract.

Herbs: Herbs may cause side effects or interact with medications. They should, therefore, be used with caution and only under the guidance of a professionally trained and qualified herbalist. With that said, there are

some of which are described below, that may be recommended by an herbal specialist for symptoms of gastritis. The herbalist would work with you to individualize your treatment.

Astragalus (*Astragalus membranaceus*)

– used traditionally to treat stomach ulcers.

May also prevent the damage from radiation or chemotherapy that can lead to gastritis.

Barberry (*Berberis vulgaris*) - This herb contains active substances called berberine alkaloids.

These substances have been shown to combat infection and bacteria. For this reason, barberry is used to ease inflammation and infection of the gastrointestinal tract. Barberry has also been used traditionally to improve appetite.

Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*): - Studies in rats have found that anthocyanidins (an antioxidant) from bilberry fruits help prevent stomach ulcers caused by a variety of factors including stress, medications, and alcohol. Whether this will translate into help for people requires research.

Cat's Claw (*Uncaria tomentosa*): The bark and root of this herb have been used among indigenous people of the rainforest for centuries to treat a variety of health problems including ulcers and other gastrointestinal disorders. The benefits of this herb may be due to its ability to reduce inflammation.

Roman Chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*):

Traditionally, Roman chamomile has been used to treat nausea, vomiting, heartburn, and excess intestinal gas.

Cranberry (*Vaccinium spp.*): May have properties that help prevent *H. pylori*.

Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*): Native Americans have traditionally used dandelion to treat kidney disease, heartburn and stomach upset, amongst other conditions.

Chinese medicinal practitioners traditionally used dandelion to treat digestive disorders, Today, dandelion roots are primarily used as an appetite stimulant and digestive aid. If you have gallbladder disease, you should not use dandelion.

Devil's Claw (*Harpagophytum procumbens*): Many professional herbalists consider devil's claw to be useful for upset stomach and loss of appetite.

Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*): In China, ginger has been used to aid digestion and treat stomach upset as well as nausea for more than 2,000 years. This herb is also thought to reduce inflammation.

Green Tea (*Camellia sinensis*): Population based studies conducted in Japan suggests that people who drink green tea regularly may be protecting themselves from developing chronic gastritis.

Licorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*) - this herb is a demulcent (soothing, coating agent) that has long been valued for its use in food and medicinal remedies, including treatments for stomach ailments. Some licorice root extracts, known as deglycyrrhized licorice (DGL), still have the healing properties of licorice without the harmful effects (like high blood pressure). DGL may be better for stomach or duodenal ulcers and may even be as effective as some prescription drugs for stomach ulcers.

Slippery Elm (*Ulmus fulva*): Although there has been little scientific research on slippery elm, it has a long history of use based on clinical experience. Gastritis and peptic ulcer are among the conditions that seem to respond to slippery elm.

Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*): Turmeric has long

medicine to treat digestive disorders. Scientific research is beginning to test the merit of this traditional use. In an animal study, for example, extracts of turmeric root reduced the release of acid from the stomach and protected against injuries such as gastritis or inflammation of the intestinal walls and ulcers. (Note: at very high doses, turmeric may induce ulcers. It is very important to stick with the dose recommended by an herbal specialist.)

Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*): Used traditionally to reduce inflammation, increase appetite, and ease stomach upset.

OTHERS: Studies show that certain individual herbal extracts as well as a combination of these extracts show promise in treating ulcers. The combination remedy also shows promise for treating dyspepsia (upper abdominal symptoms such as nausea, loss of appetite, and heartburn). In a study on 137 people with dyspepsia (indigestion), the combination preparation was as effective as the drug cisapride (a heartburn medication).

The combination preparation included the following extracts:

- Angelica (*Angelica archangelica*)
- German chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*)
- Lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*)
- Licorice
- Milk thistle (*Silybum marianum*)
- Peppermint (*Mentha x piperita*)

HOMEOPATHY: Although few studies have examined the effectiveness of specific homeopathic therapies, professional homeopaths may consider the following remedies for the treatment of gastritis symptoms (such as nausea and vomiting) based on their knowledge and experience. Before prescribing a remedy, homeopaths

take into account your constitutional type. A constitutional type is defined as your physical, emotional, and psychological makeup. An experienced homeopath assesses all of these factors when determining the most appropriate treatment for you individually

Pulsatilla -- for heartburn, queasiness, a bad taste in the mouth brought on by eating rich foods and fats (especially ice cream); symptoms may include vomiting partly digested food; this remedy is most appropriate for an individual whose tongue is coated with a white or yellow substance

Ipecacuahna -- for persistent and severe nausea, with or without vomiting and diarrhea, caused by an excess of rich or fatty foods

Carbo vegetabilis -- for bloating and indigestion, especially with flatulence and fatigue

Nux vomica -- for heartburn, nausea, retching without vomiting, and sour burps caused by overeating, alcohol use, or coffee drinking; this remedy is most appropriate for individuals who also feel irritable and sensitive to noise and light

Again, be sure to work with your alternative health care provider to develop a program for your specific challenges.

Hope these suggestions will help you *Live Well Naturally!*

