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Healing Ulcers Naturally

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Natural therapies are less expensive, more effective, and much safer.



Hippocrates, the father of Western medicine, said, "Let your food be your medicine and let your medicine be your food." It's amazing how far we've drifted from this sound advice. I remember reading the Sunday

paper a few years ago and noticing one of those "Ask the doctor" columns. The question was, "Does cabbage offer any benefit in the treatment of ulcers?" The doctor's answer was an emphatic no. He said that in his opinion the promotion of folklore is quackery.

Unfortunately, many medical professionals feel threatened that nature may provide an answer. Instead of vilifying folklore, we should be trying to vindicate it.

The fact is fresh cabbage juice has been well documented in medical literature as having remarkable success in treating ulcers. Dr. Garnett Cheney from Stanford University's School of Medicine and other researchers performed several studies using fresh cabbage juice. The majority of patients experienced complete healing in as little as seven days. Cabbage juice increases the amount of protective substances that line the intestine. A breakdown in the integrity of this lining is what causes most ulcers.

Another disturbing part of the doctor's response was his recommendation of the drugs Tagamet and Zantac, which work by blocking the natural production of stomach acid.

Each year these two drugs fight it out to see which is going to be the most widely prescribed drug in the U.S.; in 1989 it was Zantac and in 1990 and 1991 it was Tagamet. The two drugs have combined sales of

Peptic Ulcers:

"Licorice extract (DGL) has been shown to be more effective than the drugs Zantac and Tagamet in head to head comparisons" - Vol. 5 No. 3 Health Counselor

over \$4 billion worldwide.

The companies that produce Tagamet and Zantac consider them "perfect drugs" because they are expensive (a full therapeutic dose usually costs about \$150 per month), and they have the highest relapse rate (92 percent) of any anti-ulcer treatment. The result? A person becomes dependent on a very expensive drug, because without it, the ulcer may come back.

Are these really perfect drugs? For most people the answer is definitely no. Tagamet and Zantac are associated with a number of side effects, including digestive disturbances, nutritional imbalances, liver dysfunction, disruption of bone metabolism, and breast development in men.

The other medical treatment for ulcers is antacids; however, many popular antacids also

have serious side effects. The calcium carbonate antacids (Tums, Alka-2, etc.) actually produce a "rebound" effect on gastric acid secretion and may cause kidney stones. The sodium bicarbonate antacids (Rolaids, Alka-Seltzer, Bromo-Seltzer, etc.) tend to cause systemic alkalosis and interfere with heart and kidney function. The type of antacids used most often in the treatment of ulcers are aluminum-magnesium compounds (Maalox, Mylanta, Di-Gel, etc.), which may cause calcium and phosphorus depletion as well as possible aluminum toxicity or the accumulation of aluminum in the brain.

Natural approach to ulcers

Obviously, a more rational and effective approach is necessary. The natural approach to healing ulcers is to first identify and then eliminate or reduce all factors that can contribute to their development: food allergy, a low-fiber diet, cigarette smoking, stress, and drugs such as aspirin and other nonsteroidal analgesics. Once these factors have been controlled or eliminated, the

focus is directed at healing the ulcers and promoting tissue resistance. This includes drinking cabbage juice, eating a healthful diet high in fiber and low in allergenic foods, and incorporating an effective stress reduction plan.

The natural approach may also involve herbs, especially a unique licorice extract known as deglycyrrhinated licorice. Like cabbage, deglycyrrhinated licorice helps reestablish a healthy intestinal



lining. All of these important approaches are discussed in this article.

Eliminate food allergies. Strange as it may seem, clinical and experimental evidence points to food allergy as a primary cause of ulcers. The link between allergy and ulcers has been investigated in several studies. In one study, 98 percent of patients with radiographic evidence of ulcers had coexisting lower and upper respiratory tract allergic disease. In another, 25 of 43 allergic children had X-ray-diagnosed ulcers. A diet that eliminates food allergies has been used with great success in treating and preventing recurrent ulcers.

Food allergy is also consistent with the high recurrence rate of ulcers. If food allergy is the cause, the ulcers will continue to recur until the offending food or foods are eliminated from the diet. Ironically, many people with ulcers soothe themselves by drinking a lot of milk, a highly allergenic food. Increase fiber intake. A high-fiber diet is associated with a reduced rate of duodenal ulcers. The therapeutic use of a high-fiber diet in patients with recently healed duodenal ulcers can reduce the recurrence rate by half. This is probably a result of fiber's ability to promote a healthy protective layer of mucin in the stomach and intestines.

Stop smoking. Another factor strongly linked to ulcers is smoking. Increased frequency of ulcers, decreased response to therapy, and an increased mortality due to ulcers are all related to smoking.

Avoid aspirin. Aspirin is a gastric irritant that damages the lining of the stomach and predisposes individuals to ulcer development when taken regularly. The combination of aspirin and smoking is particularly harmful to the ulcer patient.

Reduce stress and emotional

factors. Many people consider stress an important factor in ulcer development. However, this belief is based on uncontrolled observations. In medical literature, the role of stress is controversial. Men and women with ulcers seem to have distinctly different psychological

profiles. In addition, several studies show the number of stressful life events is not significantly different between ulcer patients and ulcer-free controls. This data suggests the individual's response to stress, rather than the amount of stress, is the significant factor.

Emphasize specific nutrients.

Vitamins A and E have been shown to inhibit the development of stress ulcers in animals and are recognized as important factors in maintaining the integrity of the digestive tract lining. According to clinical studies in humans, zinc also has a protective effect against ulcers.

A special licorice extract

Glycyrrhizic acid, a constituent of licorice, was the first compound proven to promote healing of gastric and duodenal ulcers in a clinical setting. However, due to the known side effects of glycyrrhizic acid (it can raise blood pressure in susceptible individuals), a procedure was developed to remove it from the plant, thereby creating deglycyrrhizinated licorice. The result is a beneficial compound with no known side effects. Instead of blocking stomach acid, deglycyrrhizinated licorice stimulates the body's natural defense mechanisms that protect against ulcer formation. This includes increasing the quantity and quality of mucosal cells in the protective lining of the gut; increasing the life span of surface intestinal cells; and enhancing the blood flow to the gastrointestinal tract lining.

Numerous studies indicate deglycyrrhizinated licorice is effective only when chewed and mixed with saliva. It is generally ineffective in capsule form. Deglycyrrhizinated licorice may promote the release of salivary compounds such as urogastrone or epithelial cell growth factors, which stimulate the growth and regeneration of stomach and intestinal cells.

The recommended daily dosage for deglycyrrhizinated licorice is two

to four 380 mg. tablets—chewed thoroughly—between meals or 20 minutes before eating. This dosage should continue 8 to 16 weeks for optimum benefit.

Other herbs that may help soothe intestinal distress include American cranesbill (*Geranium maculatum*), marshmallow (*Althaea officinalis*), slippery elm (*Ulmus fulva*), okra (*Hibiscus esculentus*), echinacea or purple coneflower (*Echinacea angustifolia*), and goldenseal (*Hydrastis canadensis*). Many of these plants have a high content of mucilage, which is very soothing to the mucous membranes, including those lining the gastrointestinal tract.

NOTE: Patients with symptoms of an ulcer need competent medical care. Ulcers are usually associated with upper abdominal pain 45 to 60 minutes after meals or during the night. The pain is typically described as gnawing, burning, aching or cramp-like, and is relieved by food, antacids, or vomiting. Ulcer complications such as hemorrhage, perforation, and obstruction are medical emergencies that require immediate hospitalization and care. Patients with ulcers should be monitored by a physician, even when following the natural approaches discussed here.

Therapy that's less expensive, more effective, and safer

Current medical treatment of ulcers is far from ideal. The natural approach is safer, less expensive, and just as effective as traditional drugs. The first step is to identify and reduce or eliminate all factors implicated in the development of ulcers. The next step is to heal the ulcers and promote tissue resistance by reducing stress and by eating a diet high in fiber and low in allergenic foods. It's also wise to drink fresh cabbage juice (up to one liter daily), use deglycyrrhizinated licorice preparations, and supplement the diet with nutrients such as vitamin A, vitamin E, and zinc.

