

# The Stomach & Acidity

optimal stomach acid levels are necessary to break down food and aid digestion



## What is the role of gastric acid?

Gastric acid, commonly referred to as stomach acid, is a unique combination of hydrochloric acid (HCL), and the enzymes lipase and pepsin. This acid mix has two main functions, firstly to protect the body from any swallowed infectious agents to prevent them from reaching the intestine and causing illness, and secondly to facilitate the digestion of dietary fats and proteins which are broken down by the enzymes lipase and pepsin. This is the second stage of digestion after mastication in the mouth, where foods are broken down further before entering the intestine. Gastric acid secretion is triggered by sensory stimulation as the body prepares to receive food, such as sight and smell, and as the first proteins reach the stomach.

## Why is gastric acid important?

An imbalance in gastric acid levels, whether too high or too low, will effect digestive processes. Elevated levels of acidity may lead to symptoms of reflux, heartburn, GI discomfort, reduced appetite and ulcers. Low levels of acidity may lead to symptoms of indigestion, undigested foods in the stool, reflux, heartburn, GI discomfort and constipation. There is a large degree of overlap in symptoms which can make it challenging to identify whether an individual has high or low gastric acid.

## What factors affect gastric acid levels?

Certain nutrients are required in the diet to help the body produce gastric acid, notably zinc. The body needs to be well hydrated as fluids are key to the production of all GI secretions. Diet and lifestyle factors such as high fat, sugar, caffeine and alcohol consumption, physical activity levels, sleep, stress, smoking, and pharmaceuticals can all affect gastric acid levels. Supporting optimal gastric acid levels helps digestive processes and many other gastrointestinal symptoms.

