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Acid Blockers

When you think of stomach acid, you probably think of heartburn and ulcers, so getting rid of it may seem like a great idea. But you actually need stomach acid for healthy digestion, and blocking it can lead to serious bloat. Acid helps you break down food and absorb nutrients, and it stimulates your digestive enzymes. It also protects you from harmful bacteria that can enter your body through your mouth. Drugs such as proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) and other types of acid blockers change the pH of your stomach from acid to alkaline, turning it into a nice, friendly place for bacteria to settle and multiply—and produce lots of bloat-causing hydrogen and methane gas.

If you've been taking acid-suppressing drugs for more than a few months, it could be the reason you're bloated, especially if you're having lots of indigestion and gas after eating. It can be easy to confuse these symptoms with acid reflux, though, so you may end up increasing your dose of acid suppression or switching from one acid blocker to another, not realizing that they're the cause rather than the cure.



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Solution

- If you're on a PPI, I recommend that you try to go off the drug (check with your doctor first). Taper it slowly to avoid an acid surge, which can happen in the first few weeks after stopping it. Transitioning from daily use to every other day for a week, then every two days for a week, then every three days for a week, and so on, may help you quit more successfully.
- If there's an increase in your symptoms while you're tapering, supplement with shorter-acting antacids if possible, rather than restarting PPIs.
- Elevate the head of your bed by four to six inches with a couple of cinder blocks to make it higher than the foot of the bed, so that gravity can help prevent acid from refluxing up.
- Digestion becomes much less active once the sun sets, so give your stomach a curfew and don't eat after dark.
- Eat small, frequent meals. Your stomach is the size of your fist—overstuffing it will cause reflux in most people.
- Avoid fatty meals, which slow down stomach emptying and increase your chances of reflux.
- Consume caffeine, dairy, and alcohol with caution, since they can worsen reflux symptoms.