

BODYTALK

Balancing Acid Reflux

Gastro-Esophageal Reflux Disease (GERD), more commonly known as acid reflux, affects many millions of people all over the world. In the US alone, 47 million people suffer this syndrome. Although medications and surgical options are available, many medical professionals look to the benefits of consuming a more alkaline diet in order to control acid reflux.

For both immediate and long-term survival, the body must maintain a correct pH balance (between acid and alkaline). In fact, the link between dietary pH balance and various health issues has been recognized since the early 20th century. Why? Because the modern diet is vastly different than it was 100 years ago due to the wide availability of protein, soft drinks and fast foods. It produces an acid residue when food is metabolized and broken down. Chemicals and metallic residues are left behind that produce acid or alkaline pH potentials for the body.



Garnett Symonds

Taking symptomatic medication is not the answer. You must change your diet — and in some cases change your thinking. The human body seeks balance in all forms. GERD is simply a result of a long-standing pH imbalance. When too much acidic food is consumed, the stomach can't digest it completely. Undigested food then turns into acid waste, which causes stomach spasms or twitching. That leads to an increase in stomach gas,

which forces open the valve between the oesophagus and stomach (cardiac sphincter), allowing stomach acid into the oesophagus.

It is also very important to drink alkaline water that has a pH of 7.2 or more. A good alkaline bottled water is 100 times more effective at neutralizing body acidity than other remedies. The pH scale measures how acidic or alkaline a substance is, and it ranges from 0 to 14. If we take a pH of 7 as neutral, any reading below is acidic and above is alkaline.

A reading of 6 on the pH scale would be considered 10 times more acidic than a 7.

Chronic heartburn is the most common symptom, though you should consult a health practitioner if you experience one or a combination of the following: belching, difficulty or pain when swallowing, a sensation of food sticking in the oesophagus, chronic sore throat, laryngitis, gingivitis, erosion of teeth enamel, chronic irritation of the throat, sour taste or halitosis. Other symptoms may also be associated with this syndrome, the most common being left frontal headache and left shoulder pain.

Many GERD sufferers are people who lack the capacity to consciously cope with what is annoying them or with their own aggressive urges. They are unable to resolve their conflicts and problems. Such people either do not express their aggression at all, or they display exaggerated aggression. This emotion is acidic, and it brings me to another important facet of GERD: the Solar Plex (energy) Chakra, located at the level of the T12/L1 vertebra. All GERD patients have dysfunction of this energy centre. Overstimulation of this chakra is also connected with many kinds of skin eruptions and a wide range of nervous disorders. Usually dysfunction of this chakra is psychosomatic.

I should include a mention of the gastro-oesophageal junction (cardia) and its relationship with the *hiatus* of the diaphragm muscle. The function of the cardiac sphincter relies upon a balanced tension between the supra- and sub-hiatal forces of traction during breathing. If this balance shifts, gastric reflux is likely to occur, hence the important risk of *hiatus hernia*. This is common in more than 60 percent of people over 60. The principle causes are mechanical, but this syndrome may also be due to an excess of oestrogen or a decrease in progesterone causing *hiatus* relaxation. It's a common problem during pregnancy and at menopause. Acupuncture treatment (at the ST.34 and Ren 12-13-14 points) and Osteopathic Visceral Manipulation have both produced good results with GERD and Hiatus syndromes.

As much as diet is an important factor in the treatment of GERD, we must also consider the emotional and mental state of the patient. Both are equally important and never to be forgotten — the mind governs all! As an end note, the most important acid forming foods to avoid are coffee, sugar (cakes, biscuits, etc.), red meat, alcohol, soft drinks, cheese, processed foods and chilli peppers. Also, quit or reduce smoking.

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people: health and well-being

Cleansing Confessional

Ten-day cleansing fast at Atmanjai inspires meditative calm and alertness

Strictly speaking, Atmanjai Wellness Centre defines itself as a "tissue cleansing" centre, rather than a "detox" or "fasting" programme as such. It offers three distinct plans, and this writer — applying the up-to-your-butt-in-alligators principle of feature writing, wherein there's nothing to write about if there's no pain, and wishing to rid himself of any and all accumulated physical, mental and emotional toxins — opted for the "Master Cleanse".

By Collin Piprell

Big claims — physical, mental and spiritual — are made for "detox", an increasingly popular process also known as "cleansing": everything from reduction or remission of addictions to alleviation of symptoms, if not actual cures, of ailments ranging from psoriasis to allergies, high blood pressure and flagging sexual energy. But are clients ever disappointed?

"Very few of them," says Michael Massey, Atmanjai's marketing manager. "I can only think of a couple. And the disappointment was because of expectations they brought with them." One was a friend who afterwards said that he'd expected the experience to be more transformational in some way. The other was a woman who felt let down because she failed to lose a targeted 4 kilos. Never mind she was drop-dead gorgeous, as everyone told her, and didn't need to lose any weight."

This writer, on the other hand, who is not drop-dead gorgeous, lost 3 kilos in the pre-detox week

of vegetarianism, and dropped another 5 in the ensuing nearly 11 days of fasting.

How many people look at tissue cleansing as nothing but a quick weight-loss scheme? Certainly some do. "It depends partly on which centre you go to," says Massey. "Some even publish on their websites the claimed total number of kilos lost by their clients." The average loss among women is 4-5 kilos per week; for men it's 8-10 kilos. "Maybe men are just more full of crap," he suggests with a laugh. "Some people consider this feature to be very important, but for us it's only a secondary benefit. Let's say you lose 8 kilos. Depending on your gender, weight, size and eating habits you're going to regain 1-2 kilos in the first couple of weeks following the programme. Still, you won't gain any more in the first month after, unless you start scarfing cheeseburgers with beer."

One regular customer is in the habit of finishing the programme and then going away to assiduously wine and dine and take no exercise, steadily gaining weight



till he comes back 12 months later for a "tune-up". For him, detox is mainly a device to help maintain his preferred lifestyle. "Not that we recommend this," Massey says, adding that the vast majority of people actually establish lifestyle improvements.

So what were this writer's own motivations? Curiosity, really. Plus coercion from a *Phuket Post* editor. Basically I came to the programme a skeptic, as well as an aficionado of new experiences.

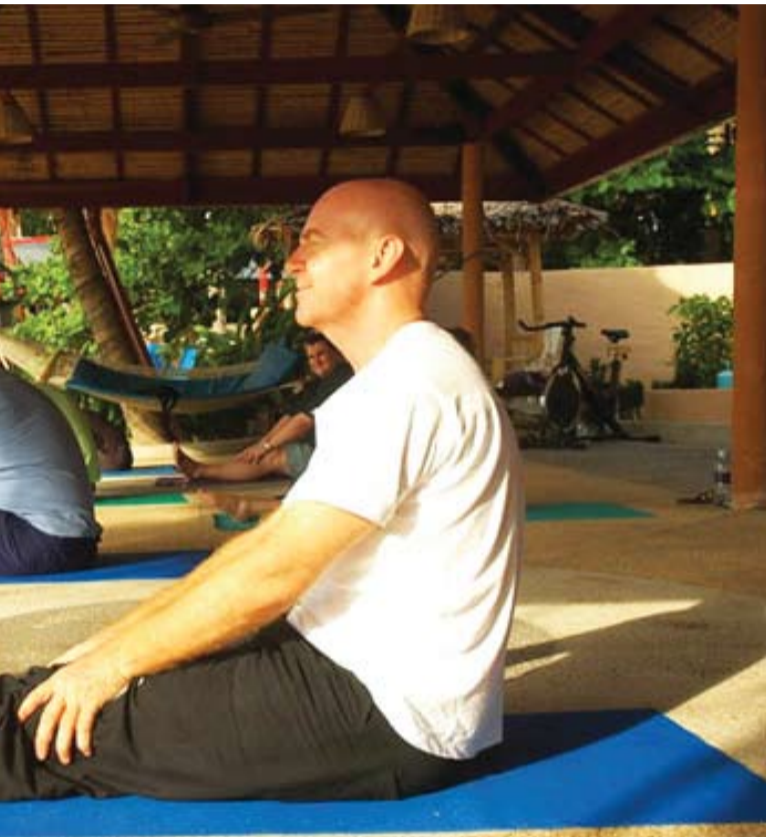
The procedure in a nutshell: For ten days I dined on nothing but a range of organic supplements designed to maintain reasonable levels of nutrition and facilitate twice-daily colonic irrigations with 20 litres of gravity-fed, triple-filtered water mixed with coffee and apple cider. My

The Tai Chi Center
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Atmanjai Wellness Centre

Atmanjai Marketing Director Michael Massey joins a morning yoga session conducted just above the sands along the rim of Chalong Bay.

“master supplements” included eight capsules and four tablets taken four times daily. (The niacin supplements, as they commonly do, caused prickly skin flushes, the only adverse reaction I experienced.) Extract of kelp stimulated the thyroid; vitamin C served several nutritional and body-function supports; and milk thistle extract cleansed the liver. Other treats included a couple of spoons of wheat germ oil per day, specially purified cod-liver oil, and liquid chlorophyll, with its load of vitamins, minerals and enzymes. A twice-daily dose of calcium and magnesium provided minerals and stimulated the metabolism of some of the other supplements. Cold-pressed golden flaxseed oil provided a bowel lubricant. A four-times-daily chugalug of psyllium husks and bentonite clay mixed with water swelled to give the intestines a good scrubbing, the psyllium helping to clear the accumulated gunk, while the clay ostensibly absorbed toxins, including heavy metals.

Atmanjai encourages clients to enjoy a massage and a herbal steam every day, and to practise yoga

and meditation with the in-house instructor every morning. The rest of the time left at one’s disposal — much of my day was dedicated to working out exactly which supplements should be ingested when — should ideally be directed to meditation and hanging around taking it easy. I

Atmanjai admits limited numbers of clients. By October 2008, the centre will cater to 24 people at a time.

found the hour-long yoga sessions especially invigorating, and credit them with making the overall experience much more pleasant than I was initially willing to concede it might be.

Not only that, the whole procedure was effective in ways that remain in part mysterious. I found myself relaxed, at once calm and alert. Not hungry, even as my mind came around to the realization that I could have breakfast that day. Other effects noted during the 10 days: a bad cold aborning disappeared overnight. A knee problem that had been with me for years vanished around the half-way mark. Patches of psoriasis on my scalp that

resisted special shampoos for years disappeared. Even my innate skepticism was threatened with erosion.

Here’s my theory of what happened. No one should be surprised by the much-touted sharpened senses of smell and taste, the energy and alertness despite any apparent source of fuel. I attribute this to some biologically evolved hunter-gatherer response to famine. It makes sense that our ancestors, facing starvation, would slip into a metabolic/perceptual gear that maximized chances of spotting sources of food and then running them down. Same goes for the immune system — we’d also want this operating in top gear, since infected wounds and suchlike would reduce the chances of successful hunting or gathering. Thus, according to my theory, reducing food intake to near zero, however counter-intuitively, can leave one wakeful and alert. Energized. Resistant to illness.

I’m not suggesting that directed fasting isn’t useful or even important. Lust and sex have evolved as biological predispositions, for example, but few would claim that this is all there is to romantic love. Part of what it is to be human is to evolve more spiritual, more satisfying states on the basis of biological drives.

And the energized alertness induced by controlled fasting can instead be redirected from hunting and gathering impulses to meditation and yoga and simple reflection on one’s being in the moment — to coming to understand oneself and one’s goals in life more clearly.

I must conclude that even the revelatory experiences reported by many Atmanjai graduates may be for real. But never mind all that — Massey claims that even people who can’t entirely understand it in empirical terms still feel the difference. “It’s a bit like electricity — we can’t see it, but we know it’s there.”

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