



## READER'S DIGEST

Dr Laurence Lovat, Consultant Gastroenterologist at The Wellington Diagnostics and Outpatients Centre in Golders Green (WDOC), talks about managing the issues surrounding indigestion



revolutionised our experience of indigestion. We then learned that the bacteria *H. pylori* had been present in human stomachs since the time of Tutankhamen and these bacteria were the cause, not only of almost all stomach ulcers, but stomach cancer as well. We discovered that we could eradicate these bacteria with multiple antibiotics and the newly invented powerful acid suppression pills called proton pump inhibitors. These drugs are now amongst the most commonly prescribed in the UK.

Later on it emerged that eradicating *H. pylori* does not help reduce indigestion for most sufferers, even though it is still frequently recommended. Stomach cancer has also been disappearing in the Western world, but this is probably due more to better hygiene, leading to less transmission of *H. pylori* through the population than due to medical intervention.

A new set of problems is now emerging; who had 'reflux' 50 years ago? Today, it is widespread. Heartburn and chest pain are often blamed on 'hiatus hernia' but half the population have these. The real cause is reflux of stomach contents, usually acid, into the oesophagus and, curiously the reason that reflux is on the rise might just be the loss of *H. pylori* from the stomach. You see, *H. pylori* suppresses acid production. As *H. pylori* disappears from the Western stomach, we are making more gastric acid than at any time in human history. This means that there is more to slosh back up into the throat. Causing misery for more than 1 in 4 of the British population every month; but good business for the makers of antacids and other indigestion remedies.

If you are one of the unlucky people, don't worry. We have treatments which allow large numbers of people with acid reflux to enjoy things they thought they would have to do without. It is now possible for many people to enjoy a curry or a glass of wine

in moderation, without paying for days afterwards. The trick is in getting the correct diagnosis and appropriate treatment. New treatments are being developed all the time. The field is moving forward quite rapidly.

There still remains a group of people who are not helped by these measures. They appear to have typical indigestion symptoms but are not helped by acid suppression medicines. Some of these people have disordered emptying of the stomach. Others have over-sensitive nerves in the gut. It is not well known, but the gut has its own independent nervous system, which is as complex as the brain. Treatments now exist which can modulate gut nerve sensations.

There remains one old truth, however. We are what we eat. We need to pay attention to our diet, whether to minimize indigestion or to prevent ourselves becoming obese. But, with advances in modern medicine, we should all be able to enjoy good food, even if only in moderation.

### Key facts about indigestion

1. Four out of 10 adults in the UK suffer with indigestion every month
2. Stomach ulcers are far less common than 20 years ago and most people with indigestion do not have one
3. Half of all adults in the UK have a hiatus hernia, although these only cause problems occasionally
4. A careful approach to diet can significantly improve indigestion
5. If diet fails, new medicines can relieve suffering easily and safely for many people

*Dr Lovat, BSc, MBBS, PhD, FRCP, consultants at WDOC every Monday 4 – 6pm and Thursday 4 – 6.30pm, with ad hoc availability*

I remember eating with my grandparents when I was young. My grandmother would serve grilled fish in a white sauce, with mashed potatoes. Dessert was milk pudding and the whole thing was washed down with milk, followed by Bisodol. My grandfather had stomach ulcers and in the 1970's, the only medicines available were antacids. Tagamet and Zantac had not yet been invented and no-one had heard of *Helicobacter pylori*. The bland white diet was ubiquitous. Despite the limited food intake, he still suffered.

Fast forward 20 years. Smith Kline and French (now GlaxoSmithKline) had developed its blockbuster drugs, which

## WHOLE FAMILY HEALTHCARE

The Wellington Diagnostics and Outpatients Centre in Golders Green (WDOC), has been providing premium healthcare for all the family, since it opened in 2007

With some of the London's most eminent consultants and medical staff supported by state-of-the-art diagnostic and imaging technology – the WDOC offers the highest standard of patient care.

But what really makes the Wellington Diagnostics and Outpatients Centre (WDOC) unique is it's fast and easily accessible children's health service.

A team of highly experienced paediatric consultants, specialising in areas such as gastroenterology, ENT

and general medicine, are available to see children from newborn to the age of 16, five days a week.

Children are regularly seen at the WDOC for both common and complex conditions. Diagnostic Imaging is available to children as well. If needed the WDOC has superb links to its sister hospital, the Portland Hospital for children under 16, and of course, The Wellington Hospital for those patients 16+.

*Opening Times: Monday – Friday: 8am-8pm*



## Let the moustache growing begin..!

The colder weather may not be the whole reason behind thousands of moustached men trotting round town. Fancy facial hair doesn't just keep the cold out; for many men it's a hat tip to the month of Movember: men supporting the promotion of raising awareness about prostate and testicular cancers.

### The official rules:

1. You must begin the 1st November with a clean shaven face
2. For the entire month of Movember you must grow and groom a moustache
3. There must be no joining of the moustache to your side burns, this is considered a beard
4. No joining of the handlebars to your chin, this is considered a goatee
5. Every man must conduct himself like a true country gentleman

Testicular cancer is the biggest cause of cancer-related deaths in men aged 15-35 years. So show your support for a great cause, and grow a mo!

*Thanks to www.movember.com*



To arrange an appointment at the Wellington Diagnostics and Outpatients Centre, please contact The Enquiry Helpline on 020 7483 5148 or visit [www.wellingtondiagnosticscentre.com](http://www.wellingtondiagnosticscentre.com)