# The HCl Challenge

A Step-by-Step Guide to Hydro-Zyme

## Why Stomach Acid Matters

Adequate stomach acid — hydrochloric acid (HCl) — is essential for breaking down protein, absorbing minerals, and keeping the gut environment balanced. When stomach acid is low, food sits and ferments, minerals pass through unabsorbed, and the door opens to bacterial overgrowth, reflux, bloating, and fatigue.

Low stomach acid is far more common than high stomach acid, even in people who feel burning or discomfort after meals. The HCl challenge is a simple way to assess where you are and calibrate your support accordingly.

Hydro-Zyme provides 150 mg of betaine HCl per tablet, along with digestive enzyme support, making it gentle enough to titrate precisely.

## Who Should NOT Do the HCl Challenge

**Do not do this challenge if any of the following apply:**

- You are currently taking prescription NSAIDs (ibuprofen, naproxen, aspirin) or corticosteroids
- You have a current, diagnosed peptic ulcer or gastric ulcer
- You have been diagnosed with active gastritis or esophagitis
- You are taking proton pump inhibitors (omeprazole, pantoprazole, etc.) — speak with me before proceeding
- You are currently experiencing heartburn or significant reflux symptoms before beginning

If you experience discomfort within 5 minutes of your very first tablet, stop immediately. You may have significant inflammation and need a different approach first.

## What You Need

- Hydro-Zyme by Biotics Research (150 mg betaine HCl per tablet)
- A protein-containing meal — the challenge is always done with a meal that includes real protein (meat, eggs, fish). Do not do this with a carbohydrate-only meal or a snack.
- A few minutes to pay attention to how you feel after eating

## The Challenge — Step by Step

Begin with one tablet mid-meal or toward the end of a protein-containing meal. Every three days, increase by one tablet. You are looking for a sensation of warmth in your upper abdomen — that is your signal that you have reached your working dose.

| Days | Tablets per Meal | What to Notice |
|---|---|---|
| **Days 1–3** | 1 tablet per protein meal | Note any warmth, burning, or discomfort |
| **Days 4–6** | 2 tablets per protein meal | If comfortable, continue increasing |
| **Days 7–9** | 3 tablets per protein meal | Warmth within 30 minutes = you're there |
| **Days 10–12** | 4 tablets per protein meal | Stay here if warmth occurs |
| **Days 13–15** | 5 tablets per protein meal | If no warmth at 5 tablets, see note below |

1. Take your first tablet mid-meal or toward the end of your protein-containing meal — never on an empty stomach.
2. Stay with one tablet per meal for three full days before increasing.
3. Every three days, add one more tablet per meal.
4. Continue increasing until you feel a sensation of warmth or mild burning in your upper abdomen — this is your signal.
5. The last dose that felt comfortable before the warmth is your working dose. Drop back to that number and hold there.
6. If warmth appears 30 minutes or more after eating, you likely need more support — this is not a sign to stop.
7. If warmth appears within 5 minutes of taking a tablet, you have gone one tablet too high. Reduce by one tablet at the next meal.
8. If you reach 5 tablets with no sensation at all, stop increasing. Switch to a higher-strength betaine HCl formula (500–700 mg) and restart from tablet one.
9. As your digestion improves over weeks and months, the amount of HCl you need will naturally decrease. If warmth begins at a lower dose than before, reduce accordingly — that is a sign of progress.
10. Take Hydro-Zyme with every meal that contains protein. You do not need it with carbohydrate-only meals or light snacks.

### If You Feel Warmth or Burning

Warmth that comes on 30 minutes or more after your meal means your dose is working — stay at that level for a few days, then try adding one more tablet to see if you can go higher.

Warmth that comes on within 5 minutes of taking a tablet means you took one tablet too many. Reduce by one at your next meal. That is still progress.

If warmth is intense or you feel it immediately after swallowing, sip a solution of 1 teaspoon of baking soda in 4 oz of room-temperature water to neutralize the acid quickly. This is not a sign that something is wrong — it is a calibration signal.

### When to Stop Immediately

- You feel burning, pain, or significant discomfort within 5 minutes of your first-ever tablet — stop and reach out before continuing
- You experience nausea, vomiting, or sharp pain at any point during the challenge
- You develop new or worsening reflux or heartburn that was not present before starting
- You feel pain or discomfort between your shoulder blades (a possible ulcer signal)

**If any of these occur, discontinue immediately and contact me before resuming.**

## A Note from Barbie

The HCl challenge is one of the most revealing things you can do to understand your digestion. For many of the people Barbie works with, low stomach acid has been undermining mineral absorption, gut balance, and energy for years without obvious signs — and this is one of the first places we can actually do something about it.

Work through this at your own pace. There is no rush, and there is no wrong answer — every bit of information you gather helps me calibrate your protocol more precisely. Reach out anytime with questions.

**Barbie Fisher**
New Leaf Health

*This protocol is provided for educational and personalized wellness support. It is not a substitute for medical diagnosis or treatment. If you have a diagnosed gastrointestinal condition, consult with your physician before beginning.*