

Spicy foods not linked to stomach aggravation

Charles Village resident Rick Spriggs loves spicy food, but worries his passion for fiery fare will aggravate his unpredictably queasy stomach.

Luckily for the 45-year-old Catholic, Good Samaritan Hospital, Baltimore, gastroenterologist Dr. Michael Blume says there is no evidence that links spicy food to stomach spasms, irritable bowel or ulcer aggravation.

“Really, there is no reason to put people on a bland diet, unless you don’t like spicy food,” Dr. Blume said. “There is also no evidence that spicy foods give you heartburn. There are some people who get heartburn after they eat high-fat foods. But, the myth about spicy food I think is just a myth.”

There also is no evidence that spicy food provides health benefits, Dr. Blume said.

“Unless you consider that spicy foods may make people eat more slowly,” he said. “That can be seen as a benefit, because it’s better for the digestion to eat at a slower pace and to chew your food more thoroughly.”

Restrictive diets containing less salt, sodium and sugar are often prescribed for people with diabetes and hypertension, and humans tend to function more efficiently on a lower-fat diet, Dr. Blume said.

However, gastro-stomach problems are often a result of how fast one eats, how late they consume or the amount they ingest, he said.

Even those who believe they are lactose intolerant, usually are not, Dr. Blume said.

“I can’t remember the last time I diagnosed a food intolerance,” the 55-year-old gastroenterologist said. “People get symptoms after they eat. It’s usually related to the act of eating rather than specific foods in their diet.”

Dr. Blume’s advice on eating issues is simple. If a certain food causes consistent stomach aggravation, don’t eat it.

“Most people know what bothers them,” he said. “You don’t need to stay away from spicy food unless it bothers you.”