



Heartburn & indigestion

Heartburn has nothing to do with the heart. It involves the esophagus and the stomach. The esophagus passes behind the breastbone alongside the heart. The irritation that takes place there feels like a burning feeling in the heart. Indigestion is a general term for discomfort in the abdomen that comes after eating.



SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- A burning feeling behind the breastbone occurs after eating.
- Chest pain is felt when you bend over or lie down.
- Your mouth has a bitter, hot, or sour taste.

TREATMENT

Self-care treats most cases of this common problem. Heartburn symptoms can be confused, though, with ones of a heart attack or other medical problems.

CAUSES

Gastric acids from the stomach splash back up into the lower portion of the esophagus. This causes pain. The medical term for this is gastroesophageal reflux. Most people have this once in awhile. The digestive acids don't harm the stomach because it has a coating to protect it. The esophagus does not so the acids can cause pain. This condition can become a disease, or GERD, when symptoms become more severe and long-lasting that are bothersome or can lead to complications.

Common Heartburn Triggers

- Aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen sodium, arthritis medicine, or corticosteroids.
- Heavy meals. Eating too fast. Chocolate. Garlic. Onions. Mint. Spicy or high-fat foods. Tomatoes and citrus fruits.
- Smoking or lying down after eating
- Drinking alcohol or coffee (regular and sometimes decaffeinated)
- Being overweight
- Swallowing too much air
- Stress
- Hiatal hernia
- Pregnancy

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TRIAGE QUESTIONS



Does the heartburn come with any heart attack warning signs?

NO

YES

GET EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE



Do you vomit blood or material that looks like coffee grounds? Or, are your stools tarlike, maroon, or bloody in color?

NO

YES

GET EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE



With heartburn symptoms, do you also have pain that goes through to your back or a gripping pain in your upper abdomen? Or, do you feel lightheaded or did you faint?

NO

YES

GET EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE



With heartburn symptoms, is it hard for you to swallow? Has the heartburn occurred often over 3 days and/or has self-care brought no relief?

NO

YES

CALL DOCTOR



USE SELF-CARE



FOR MORE INFORMATION:

National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK)
niddk.nih.gov



SELF-CARE / PREVENTION

- Sit straight while you eat. Stand up or walk around after you eat. Bending over or lying down after you eat makes it too easy for stomach acids to move up to the esophagus.
- Don't smoke.
- Lose weight if you are overweight.
- If heartburn bothers you at night, raise the head of the bed. Put the head of your bed up on 6-inch blocks. You can also buy a special wedge that is made to be placed between the mattress and box spring. Don't just prop your head up with pillows. This makes the problem worse by putting pressure on your stomach.
- Don't wear garments that fit tight around the abdomen.
- Limit alcohol.
- Eat small meals.
- Avoid foods that trigger heartburn.
- Limit foods and drinks with air. Examples are whipped cream and carbonated drinks.
- Don't eat or drink for 2 to 3 hours before bedtime.
- If you take aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen sodium, or arthritis medicines, take them with food.
- Try taking antacids, such as Tums. If these don't bring relief, take an over-the-counter acid controller, such as Pepcid AC, Tagamet HB, etc. These prevent and relieve heartburn. {Note: Read labels before taking antacids or acid controllers. Check with your doctor, too. Adverse side effects are more likely and more severe in older persons who take some acid controllers, such as Tagamet HB.}
- Don't take baking soda. It is high in sodium and is not recommended for long-term use.