

Heartburn and Indigestion

Indigestion is an uncomfortable feeling associated with eating or drinking. Heartburn is a painful, burning feeling in the upper abdomen or chest, or up into the throat. Simple lifestyle changes can often help to relieve these symptoms and there are also medicines that can help.

Indigestion

Indigestion is a general term for upper abdominal discomfort associated with eating and drinking.

Indigestion includes:

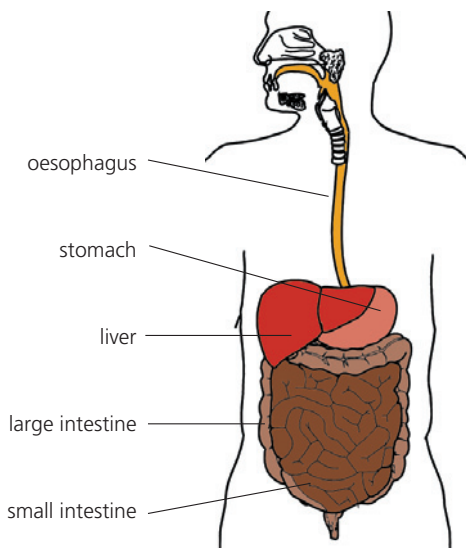
- Abdominal discomfort, pain or cramps
- Burping
- Nausea, loss of appetite
- A bloated or full stomach feeling.

Indigestion is sometimes associated with a medical condition or taking certain medicines.

Heartburn

Heartburn is a painful burning feeling rising up from the stomach or lower chest towards the neck. It occurs when

The Digestive System



stomach acid refluxes (flows back up) into the oesophagus (food pipe) and irritates the inner lining of the oesophagus. This reflux happens when the valve that separates the oesophagus and the stomach does not close properly. Symptoms are often made worse by lying down, bending forward or straining.

Other symptoms of reflux include:

- Regurgitation of food or fluid into the mouth
- An acidic, sour or bitter taste in your mouth
- Excessive burping
- Nausea
- Chest pain
- Dry cough, especially at night
- Sore throat.

Frequent heartburn and reflux symptoms can be signs of gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD). GORD involves repeated reflux of stomach acid which can cause inflammation and damage to the lining of the oesophagus, called oesophagitis.

Risk factors

Things that increase the chances of getting indigestion and heartburn or reflux include:

- Certain foods (e.g., rich, spicy and fatty food, chocolate, peppermint, onions)
- Alcohol

- Caffeine
- A large meal
- Eating quickly
- Physical activity soon after a large meal
- Stress and anxiety
- Being overweight
- Wearing tight waist bands or belts
- Pregnancy, particularly late pregnancy
- Smoking
- Certain medicines (e.g., *aspirin*, *non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs*, *alendronate*, *risedronate*, *doxycycline*, *minocycline*) – ask a pharmacist for information.

Self care

Try to identify and avoid things that make your symptoms worse. Simple changes to diet and lifestyle that can often prevent or reduce the symptoms of indigestion and heartburn include:

- Eat less fatty and spicy food, chocolate, peppermints and other known problem foods
- Eat smaller meals
- Eat slowly and chew food well
- Drink less alcohol
- Have less caffeine (e.g., coffee, tea, cola, energy drinks)
- Don't eat for 2–3 hours before going to bed
- Do not slump in a chair, bend over or lie down soon after meals
- Go for a short walk after your main meal

Important

Consult a doctor if:

- It is the first time you have experienced symptoms, especially if you are over 40 years
 - You experience indigestion, heartburn or other symptoms of reflux several times a week
 - Heartburn wakes you at night
 - Symptoms are getting worse or are severe
 - Symptoms are constant or keep returning, even with treatment
 - It is difficult or painful to swallow
 - Your bowel motions are black and tar-like or have blood in them
 - You vomit and your vomit looks like coffee grounds or has blood in it
 - You have lost weight and do not know why
 - Symptoms get worse with or after exercise
 - You have shortness of breath, sweating or pain radiating to your jaw, neck or arm.
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- Wear loose clothing around your waist
 - Elevate the head of the bed
 - Reach and keep to a healthy weight
 - Don't smoke
 - Learn and practice relaxation techniques to manage stress.

Medicines

Medicines can relieve or prevent symptoms of indigestion and heartburn. Some are available from a pharmacist without a prescription. Pharmacists can advise on the best medicine for you and whether you should consult a doctor. Some of these medicines may interfere with other medicines that you take. Always ask a pharmacist or doctor for advice.

The medicines used for indigestion, heartburn and gastro-oesophageal reflux disease include:

- Antacids – which neutralise stomach acid. They may help relieve mild occasional symptoms
- Alginates – which form a coating on top of stomach contents. They may help relieve mild occasional symptoms
- H2 antagonists (e.g., *ranitidine*, *famotidine*, *nizatidine*) – which reduce gastric acid production in the stomach
- Proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) (e.g., *esomeprazole*, *omeprazole*, *pantoprazole*, *lansoprazole*, *rabeprazole*) – which stop most of the gastric acid production in the stomach
- Prokinetic medicines (e.g., domperidone, metoclopramide) – which speed up the passage of food through the stomach.

Note: PPIs and H2 antagonists, which reduce production of stomach acid, are also used to protect the inner lining of the stomach and oesophagus during treatment with non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as ibuprofen, naproxen and diclofenac.

For more information

Heartburn and heartburn friendly recipes

Website www.heartburn.com.au

Healthdirect Australia

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: www.healthinsite.gov.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets.

National Prescribing Service (NPS) Medicines Information

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: www.nps.org.au

The Poisons Information Centre

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts.

Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

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