



Heartburn & 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 gastrointestinal discomfort associated with eating and drinking.

Indigestion includes:

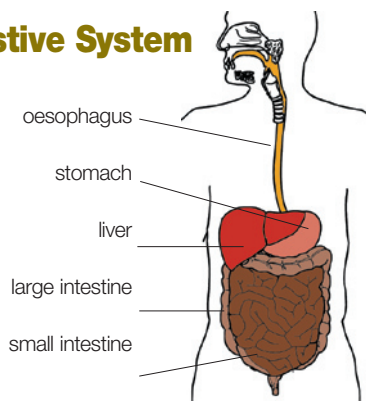
- Stomach discomfort, pain or cramps
- Belching
- Nausea, loss of appetite
- A bloated or full stomach feeling.

Indigestion is sometimes associated with taking certain medicines.

Heartburn

Heartburn is a common type of indigestion. It occurs when stomach acid rises up (refluxes or regurgitates) into the oesophagus (food pipe) and irritates the inner lining of the oesophagus. Sometimes fluid and food reflux up into the mouth. 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.

The Digestive System



Heartburn includes:

- A painful burning feeling in the centre of the upper abdomen or chest, sometimes moving up to the back of your throat
- A 'lump' deep in your throat
- An acidic, sour or bitter taste in your mouth.

Heartburn can sometimes cause a cough or sore throat.

Constant reflux and heartburn can be a sign of gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD) and can cause inflammation and damage in the oesophagus.

Important

Consult a doctor if:

- It is the first time you have experienced symptoms, especially if you are over 40 years
- You regularly use non-prescription medicines for what you think is indigestion
- 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.

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 can neutralise stomach acid. They may help relieve mild occasional symptoms.
- Alginates – which can form a coating on top of stomach contents. They may help relieve mild occasional symptoms

- H2 antagonists (e.g., *ranitidine*, *famotidine*, *nizatidine*) – which reduce stomach acid production
- Proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) (e.g., *esomeprazole*, *omeprazole*, *pantoprazole*, *lansoprazole*, *rabeprazole*) – which reduce stomach acid production.

Sometimes medicines that relieve nausea (e.g., *metoclopramide*, *domperidone*) can also help relieve indigestion.

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.

Risk factors

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

- Certain foods (e.g., rich, spicy and fatty food, chocolate and peppermint)
- A large meal
- Eating quickly
- Drinking alcohol
- Drinking coffee
- Physical activity soon after a large meal
- A diet low in fibre
- 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* and *doxycycline*) – Ask a pharmacist for information.

Self care

Some simple changes to diet and lifestyle can often prevent or reduce the symptoms of indigestion and heartburn. For example:

- Eat less fatty and spicy food, chocolate, peppermints and other known problem foods.
- Eat smaller meals.
- Eat slowly and chew food well.
- Reduce alcohol consumption.
- Reduce caffeine consumption (e.g., coffee, tea and cola drinks).
- Don't eat for 2-3 hours before going to bed.

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

- Do not slump in a chair, bend over or lie down soon after meals.
- Go for a short walk after your main meal.
- 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.

Related fact cards

- *Exercise and the Heart*
- *Smoking*
- *Pain Relievers*
- *Weight and Health*
- *Relaxation Techniques*

For more information

Heartburn and heartburn friendly recipes – website www.heartburn.com.au

HealthInsite – website www.healthinsite.gov.au

Gastroenterological Society of Australia, Digestive Health Foundation – ph (02) 9256 5454 or website – www.gesa.org.au/consumer/overview/index.htm

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflets – your pharmacist can advise on availability.

NPS Medicines Line – phone 1300 888 763 Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm EST.

The Poisons Information Centre – in case of poisoning phone 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacy Self Care Support – phone 1300 369 772 and ask for the Pharmacy Self Care Field Officer.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

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