

Heartburn and Indigestion

Indigestion (dyspepsia) is a general term for pain or discomfort felt in the stomach and under the ribs.

Heartburn is when acid moves up from the stomach into the gullet (oesophagus) and causes a burning pain behind your breastbone.

Indigestion and heartburn can occur together or on their own. It's a common problem that affects most people at some point. In most cases it's mild and only occasionally occurs.

Managing your condition

It may be possible to ease your symptoms by making a few simple changes to your diet and lifestyle. Indigestion and heartburn symptoms will usually improve within 1 or 2 weeks. But if you find you keep taking indigestion medicines all the time for several weeks or that your symptoms affect your day to day life, you need to consult your GP.

How can I avoid triggers / suggested lifestyle changes

- **Diet** - In about 8 out of 10 people, symptoms will improve by making lifestyle changes alone, such as healthier eating and losing weight.
 - Avoid fatty and fried meals
 - Avoid eating large meals late in the day
 - Avoid carbonated soft drinks, coffee and alcohol
 - Eat slowly and chew properly
- **Stop smoking** - This may help improve your symptoms.
- **Bedtime** - If you tend to experience indigestion symptoms at night, avoid eating for 3 to 4 hours before you go to bed.
- **Medicine review** - Some medicines can cause heartburn/ indigestion symptoms. You can review the side effects on the information of medication you currently take. If you feel it may be the cause speak with your pharmacist, GP or nurse for advice before stopping. Avoiding aspirin-like drugs; if you take anti-inflammatory pain killers regularly, such as aspirin or ibuprofen, consult a health professional in case these could be the cause of the indigestion.

How do I treat?

Try lifestyle changes first, but if these don't work alone, you can expect your symptoms to improve by taking over-the-counter or prescribed medication. There are a variety of products available to treat the symptoms of indigestion and heartburn.

- **Antacids** - Can provide immediate relief for mild to moderate symptoms of indigestion. They work by neutralising the acid in your stomach (making it less acidic), so it no longer irritates the lining of your digestive system. The effect of an antacid only lasts for a few hours at a time, so you may need to take more than one dose.
- **Alginates** - Some antacids also contain a medicine called an alginate. This helps relieve heartburn caused by acid reflux. Alginates form a foam barrier that floats on the surface of your stomach contents, keeping stomach acid in your stomach and away from your oesophagus. You can buy these from pharmacies and supermarkets. Examples include Peptac® liquid.
- **Other Medicines** - There are some other medicines which help to reduce the amount of acid the stomach produces. Some of these drugs are available to buy without the need for a prescription. It's best not to take these medicines for prolonged periods without consulting a pharmacist or other health professional.

Examples of products available to buy include

- **Antacids** - Rennie® or Tums® you can buy these products from supermarkets/ shops and pharmacies
- **Alginates** - Peptac® liquid or Gaviscon® you can buy these from supermarkets/ shops and pharmacies
- **Other Medicines** - Omeprazole or Pantoprazole can only be bought from pharmacies
Ranitidine 75mg can be bought from supermarkets, shops and pharmacies

When should I seek advice?

Rarely, more serious medical problems may cause indigestion and/or heartburn – particularly if you are aged 55 or over. Seek medical advice if your symptoms do not respond to treatment or you notice any of the following:

- **Pain and other chest/stomach symptoms** - If you suffer from severe, persistent (longer than 3 weeks), worsening and unexplained pain in your upper abdomen – particularly if occurring together with other symptoms, such as pain in your chest, breathlessness, sweating, feeling sick or vomiting
- **Vomiting blood** - You vomit blood or dark lumps (like 'coffee grounds')
- **Dark stools** - Your stool colour has become very dark (looking like tar). But remember that if you take iron tablets your stool can also become black – a harmless side effect which will end when you stop taking iron
- **Feeling faint** - You feel faint, or you've collapsed
- **Swallowing problems** - You develop difficulties with swallowing
- **Other problems** - You suffer from unexplained fever, night sweats, weight loss for no apparent reason, or you notice a swelling or mass in your upper abdomen

More information is available at the following website

- NHS website - www.nhs.uk
- Or visit your local pharmacy for advice.

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