

Free Yourself From Heartburn Pain

Developed by the American Pharmacists Association. Improving medication use. Advancing patient care.

Heartburn happens when stomach acid flows backward, up into your esophagus—the tube that carries food from your mouth to your stomach. Sometimes, partially digested food flows all the way to the back of your throat. This backward flow is called reflux.

If you have heartburn, you don't need to suffer in silence. Don't hesitate to ask your pharmacist questions about heartburn, and the lifestyle changes and prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) medications that can provide relief. He or she can be your partner in treatment.

Use this checklist to decide whether you have heartburn or a more serious condition.

IS IT HEARTBURN?

- After meals—or after eating certain foods—do you sometimes feel a warmth or pain at your breastbone? Yes No
- Do you sometimes have an acid taste in the back of your throat? Yes No
- Do you ever feel that food is coming back into your mouth? Yes No
- When you lie down, especially after a large meal, do you get these feelings? Yes No
- Do these feelings go away when you take antacids or OTC acid blockers? Yes No

If you can answer yes to any of these five questions, then you have heartburn—but read on.

IS IT MORE THAN HEARTBURN?

- Is your heartburn severe? Yes No
- Do you have heartburn two or more times each week? Yes No
- Has it lasted for several months? Yes No
- Do you regularly take medications for it—and it still comes back? Yes No

If you can answer yes to any of these last four questions, you may have a more serious problem.

Talk to your primary health care provider.

Three Myths About Heartburn

Myth #1: Heartburn is no big deal.

Fact: Heartburn pain can severely limit what you do and how well you do it. Your health care provider or pharmacist can help you treat it.

Myth #2: My heartburn is my own fault.

Fact: You didn't cause your heartburn, but you can take a number of steps to lessen its pain and inconvenience.

Myth #3: Heartburn is not a serious medical problem.

Fact: Heartburn can progress to cause more serious problems including these two:

- Inflammation and ulcers in your esophagus.
- A change in the cells of the esophagus lining.

Never ignore severe or persistent heartburn. Contact your health care provider. He or she can do tests to find out whether your heartburn has led to any more serious health problems.

Four Ways to Get Your Heartburn Under Control

The causes of heartburn vary from person to person. These suggestions may help you discover what your personal triggers are.

Watch what and how you eat.

- Avoid certain foods. Be cautious about eating citrus fruits, tomato products, fatty or greasy foods, chocolates, pepper mints, vinegar, spicy foods, garlic, raw onions, and black or red pepper.
- Stay away from certain beverages—especially on an empty stomach. The drinks most likely to cause heartburn include coffee, tea, carbonated drinks, citrus drinks and juices, tomato juice, and alcohol.
- Eat smaller, more frequent meals rather than three large meals each day.
- For 2 to 3 hours after eating, avoid lying down, bending over repeatedly, or doing vigorous exercise.

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