

Self Care Information for Patients: Heartburn and Indigestion

Summary

Heartburn is a burning feeling in the chest caused by stomach acid travelling up towards the throat (acid reflux). Heartburn and acid reflux are the same thing and are a symptom of indigestion (dyspepsia).

What can you do to help?

- Coffee, alcohol, chocolate, and fatty or spicy foods can make symptoms worse, so consume these in moderation or try to reduce your current consumption.
- Try to eat smaller, more frequent meals and do not eat within 3 to 4 hours before going to bed.
- Reflux is more common in patients who are overweight, so losing weight can help.
- If you smoke, the chemicals you inhale may contribute to indigestion. These chemicals can cause the muscle that separates your oesophagus from your stomach to relax, causing acid reflux, so consider getting help to quit.
- Stress and anxiety can worsen symptoms, so try to find ways to relax.
- Anti-inflammatory painkillers (like ibuprofen) can make indigestion worse, so speak to your pharmacist or doctor if these symptoms occur.
- Propping your head and shoulders up in bed or raising one end of your bed by 10 to 20cm to make it so your chest and head are above the level of your waist, can stop stomach acid coming up while you sleep.
- Pregnant women often get indigestion, your pharmacist can recommend the best medicines to use over-the-counter.
- For further information visit this website: [nhs.uk-Heartburn and Acid Reflux](https://www.nhs.uk-Heartburn-and-Acid-Reflux).

When shall I see a General Practitioner (GP)?

If:

- Lifestyle changes and pharmacy medicines aren't helping.
- You have heartburn most days for 3 weeks or more.
- You have other symptoms, like food getting stuck in your throat or frequently being sick.
- You feel like you have a lump in your stomach.
- You are in bad pain.

- You are feeling faint.
- You are 55 years of age or older.
- You have lost a lot of weight without meaning to.
- You have difficulty swallowing (dysphagia).
- You have iron deficiency anaemia.
- You have bloody vomit.
- You have blood in your poo.

Document History

Version: V1.1

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Approved by: Integrated medicines optimisation committee (IMOC)

Approval date: November 2021

Review Date: 2 years from approval date or sooner where appropriate.