



GastroDoxs
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Heartburn

A Practical Guide For Patients

832-632-4070

info@gastrodoxs.com

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Introduction: Heartburn

Heartburn is a common health concern that can affect people of all ages and lifestyles. It may range from mild discomfort to severe, persistent burning sensations in the chest or throat that interfere with daily activities. Heartburn can be caused by a variety of factors, including acid reflux, spicy or fatty foods, stress, medications, or overeating. In some cases, it may signal an underlying digestive condition like GERD (Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease) that requires medical attention. Understanding the possible causes, symptoms, and triggers of heartburn is an important first step toward effective management and long-term relief. Early evaluation and appropriate care can help prevent complications and improve overall digestive health.

Key Takeaways

- **Heartburn** can range from mild discomfort to severe, ongoing burning sensations in the chest or throat.
- **Common causes** include acid reflux, GERD, spicy foods, stress, and overeating.
- **Tracking symptoms**, timing, and triggers helps identify the underlying issue.
- **Dietary habits** and lifestyle choices, such as meal timing and alcohol consumption, play a major role in heartburn management.
- **Persistent or severe heartburn** should be evaluated by a medical professional.



What Causes Heartburn?

Known Causes

Heartburn can occur for many reasons, ranging from occasional discomfort to more serious digestive conditions. One of the most common causes is acid reflux, where stomach acid moves up into the esophagus, often triggered by overeating, eating too quickly, or consuming spicy, fatty, or acidic foods. Bloating and gas can also contribute to chest discomfort or a feeling of fullness. Inflammation of the esophagus, known as esophagitis, and conditions like GERD (Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease) can cause persistent burning pain. Stress and anxiety are often overlooked contributors, as they can exacerbate heartburn symptoms and disrupt digestion. Food intolerances, such as sensitivity to caffeine, chocolate, or citrus, can trigger heartburn after meals. In some cases, heartburn may be linked to more serious conditions, like hiatal hernia or peptic ulcers. Understanding patterns, triggers, and accompanying symptoms is essential for proper diagnosis and effective treatment.



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Common Signs & Symptoms

Common signs of heartburn include a burning sensation in the chest or throat, regurgitation of acid or food, a sour taste in the mouth, difficulty swallowing, and a sensation of fullness or pressure. Symptoms may vary in intensity and can sometimes be accompanied by a chronic cough, hoarseness, nausea, or a sore throat. In severe cases, heartburn may lead to chest pain that can mimic other heart-related issues.

Core Symptoms Include:

- Persistent or recurring heartburn
- Bloating or excessive gas
- Nausea or vomiting
- Burning sensation in the chest or throat
- Loss of appetite or early fullness
- Difficulty swallowing
- Regurgitation or sour taste in the mouth



Severe cases can also cause:



- Intense or worsening heartburn
- Chest pain or discomfort
- Persistent vomiting
- Blood in vomit or stool
- Unexplained weight loss
- Severe weakness or fatigue
- Dizziness or fainting
- Difficulty swallowing or eating



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Diagnosis & Medical Testing

Diagnosing heartburn may involve reviewing symptoms, medical history, and physical exams. Doctors may recommend blood tests, imaging studies, or endoscopic procedures like an upper endoscopy to assess the esophagus for damage from acid reflux, identify inflammation, or diagnose conditions such as GERD (Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease) or hiatal hernia.

Diagnostic Tools

- Physical examination to check for tenderness or signs of acid reflux
- Medical history review to understand symptoms and potential triggers of heartburn
- Blood tests to detect infection, inflammation, or signs of GERD
- Stool tests to identify blood or gastrointestinal issues related to heartburn
- Breath tests for H. pylori infection, which can contribute to acid reflux
- Abdominal ultrasound to check for hiatal hernia or other related issues
- CT scan for detailed imaging of the esophagus and stomach
- Upper endoscopy (EGD) to examine the esophagus, stomach lining, and identify acid reflux damage
- Colonoscopy to evaluate the lower digestive tract if symptoms suggest other issues
- H. pylori testing to detect bacterial infection contributing to heartburn
- Food intolerance testing to identify foods that trigger heartburn or acid reflux
- MRI scan to assess soft tissues and organs related to digestive health



Diet

A balanced diet plays an important role in managing heartburn. Eating smaller, regular meals and choosing easily digestible foods can reduce acid reflux and irritation. Limiting spicy, fatty, and acidic foods, as well as caffeine, while staying hydrated, helps support digestion and prevent heartburn flare-ups.

Key Insights

- Eating smaller, frequent meals reduces stomach pressure and prevents acid reflux
- Avoiding spicy and oily foods helps prevent esophageal irritation
- High-fiber foods support digestive health and reduce acid reflux symptoms
- Staying hydrated aids in digestion and helps dilute stomach acid
- Limiting caffeine and alcohol reduces acid production and reflux risk
- Fresh, home-cooked meals are easier on the digestive system and less likely to trigger heartburn
- Skipping meals can worsen heartburn by increasing stomach acid production



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Medications & Treatment Options

Heartburn can be effectively managed with a combination of medications and lifestyle changes. Over-the-counter antacids, H2 blockers, and proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) are commonly used to reduce acid production and provide relief. For severe cases, prescription medications or even surgery may be recommended. Lifestyle changes like dietary adjustments and weight management play an important role in preventing heartburn flare-ups.

Treatment Options

- **Antacids (e.g., Tums, Maalox)** – Neutralizes stomach acid for quick relief.
- **H2 Blockers (e.g., ranitidine, famotidine)** – Reduces acid production for longer relief.
- **Proton Pump Inhibitors (PPIs) (e.g., omeprazole, esomeprazole)** – Blocks acid production and heals esophageal damage.
- **Prokinetics** – Increases stomach motility to prevent acid reflux.
- **Bile Acid Sequestrants** – Prevents bile from worsening reflux symptoms.
- **Surgery (Fundoplication)** – Surgical intervention for severe GERD.
- **Avoid Trigger Foods** – Limit spicy, fatty, and acidic foods to reduce heartburn.
- **Eat Smaller, More Frequent Meals** – Helps prevent overeating, which can trigger acid reflux.
- **Stay Upright After Eating** – Reduces acid flow into the esophagus.



Advanced Therapies & Procedures

If lifestyle changes and medications do not provide sufficient relief, more advanced treatments may be necessary. These may include procedures to repair damage caused by acid reflux or manage severe GERD symptoms. Advanced therapies can provide long-term relief and prevent complications associated with chronic heartburn.

Therapy Options

- **Fundoplication Surgery** – A procedure where the top of the stomach is wrapped around the esophagus to prevent acid reflux.
- **LINX System** – A small ring of magnetic beads implanted around the lower esophagus to prevent acid from entering the esophagus.
- **Esophageal Dilation** – A procedure used to stretch the esophagus if it has narrowed due to scarring from acid reflux.
- **Endoscopic Procedures** – Minimally invasive techniques that can help repair the esophagus or prevent acid reflux.
- **Bariatric Surgery** – Weight loss surgery that may reduce symptoms of GERD by decreasing abdominal pressure.
- **Radiofrequency Ablation (RFA)** – A procedure that uses heat to remove damaged tissue in the esophagus.
- **Stretta Procedure** – Uses radiofrequency energy to strengthen the lower esophageal sphincter, reducing reflux.



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Coping With HeartBurn

Managing heartburn involves making mindful lifestyle choices, including eating smaller meals, avoiding trigger foods, staying hydrated, and managing stress. Tracking symptoms, avoiding lying down after meals, and following medical advice can help reduce discomfort and support long-term digestive health.

Practical Strategies

- Eat smaller, frequent meals to reduce pressure on the esophagus and prevent acid reflux
- Avoid trigger foods such as spicy, fatty, or acidic items that can worsen heartburn
- Stay hydrated to help dilute stomach acid and support digestion
- Eat slowly and chew food thoroughly to prevent overeating and acid reflux
- Manage stress with relaxation or breathing techniques to prevent stress-related heartburn
- Avoid lying down immediately after eating to prevent acid from flowing back into the esophagus



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FAQS About Heartburn



Q1: What is heartburn?

A: Heartburn is a burning sensation in the chest or throat caused by stomach acid flowing back into the esophagus. It's commonly associated with acid reflux or GERD (Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease).

Q2: What are common causes of heartburn?

A: Common causes include overeating, spicy or fatty foods, alcohol, caffeine, smoking, stress, and lying down right after meals. Conditions like GERD, hiatal hernia, and obesity can also contribute.

Q3: How can I prevent heartburn?

A: Prevent heartburn by eating smaller, more frequent meals, avoiding trigger foods, staying hydrated, maintaining a healthy weight, and managing stress. Also, avoid lying down after meals and limit alcohol and caffeine intake.

Q4: When should I see a doctor for heartburn?

A: If heartburn occurs frequently (more than twice a week), is severe, or interferes with your daily life, it's important to consult a healthcare provider. Persistent heartburn can lead to complications such as GERD or esophageal damage.



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Take **Action**

If you experience **Heartburn**, don't ignore them. Early diagnosis and treatment can prevent complications. Schedule a consultation with GastroDoxs for expert guidance on managing your digestive health.

Visit GastroDoxs.com to schedule an appointment and access more resources on digestive health.

**Your health matters take
the next step today!**

SCHEDULE AN APPOINTMENT

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