

# Self care fact sheet – Indigestion and Heartburn



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 prevent indigestion and heartburn?

- 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: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/heartburn-and-acid-reflux/>

## When shall I seek help? 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
- feel like you have a lump in your stomach
- are in bad pain
- are 55 years of age or older
- have lost a lot of weight without meaning to
- have difficulty swallowing (dysphagia)
- have iron deficiency anaemia
- have bloody vomit
- have blood in poo

