

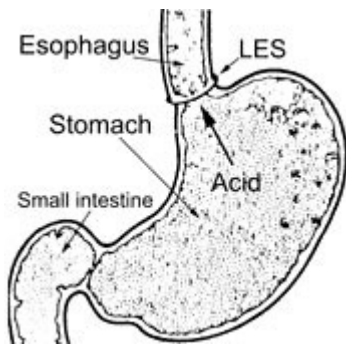
What is gastroesophageal reflux disease?

- Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) is a digestive disorder.
- It is also called heartburn and acid indigestion.
- It is the backward flow of acid from the stomach up into the esophagus.

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What causes heartburn?

- The digestive system turns food into energy and removes waste from the body.
- It is made up of the mouth, esophagus (tube to the stomach), the small and large intestine, and the rectum.
- In normal digestion, a muscle called the LES (see figure below) blocks the esophagus so acid from the stomach can't go back up into the throat.
- Heartburn happens when the muscle doesn't work right and lets acid from the stomach back up into the throat.
- Infants and children can get heartburn if their digestive system is not working right yet.



Who can get heartburn?

- Anyone can get heartburn.
- Infants and children can get heartburn.
- Heartburn is more common in the elderly and in women during pregnancy.
- Children with developmental or neurological disabilities are more likely to get heartburn than healthy children. Their symptoms may be worse.

What are the symptoms of heartburn?

- Heartburn is usually felt as a burning chest pain or pressure in the chest. The pain starts behind the breastbone and moves up to the neck and throat.
- Some people taste the bitter and sour acid that has moved up their throat from the stomach.
- Almost all infants spit up, but if an infant spits up or throws up almost every time he eats and seems fussy, he may have heartburn.
- Symptoms can last as long as 2 hours.
- Symptoms are often made worse by eating food.
- Lying down and bending over often makes symptoms worse.
- Symptoms of heartburn are often mistaken for signs of a heart attack or heart disease. Pain from a heart condition is usually made worse by physical activity. Heartburn is not usually caused by physical activity.

How is heartburn treated?

- In many cases, symptoms can be controlled by making diet and lifestyle changes.
- Avoid food and drinks that can lead to heartburn such as chocolate, coffee, peppermint, greasy (fried) or spicy foods, tomato products, and alcohol.
- Try eating smaller portions of food.
- If overweight, lose weight.
- Avoid eating 2-3 hours before bed.

- Prop up your head on a higher pillow to sleep. Raise the head of the crib or basinet.
- Burp your infant more frequently during feeding.
- Keep upright after feeding (this does not mean in a carseat or ‘pumpkin’ seat, as this can increase reflux)
- Standing up instead of lying down or bending over can often ease pain.
- Your doctor may send your child to a gastroenterologist (a doctor who specializes in disorders of the gastrointestinal tract).
- The doctor may take tests to find the cause of the problem.
- In few cases, surgery may be needed.
- Infants and children with heartburn usually grow out of the condition.
- Older children/adolescents: Stop smoking. Use an over-the-counter antacid, such as Maalox or Tums.

How long does heartburn last?

- Symptoms can last as long as 2 hours.
- If left untreated, heartburn can lead to serious problems. It can cause severe chest pain, make the esophagus narrow, or cause bleeding.

How can heartburn be prevented?

- Avoid food and drinks that can lead to heartburn.
- Frequent burping
- Smaller feedings
- Upright position after feeding
- Stop smoking.
- Lose weight if needed.
- Avoid eating 2-3 hours before bed.

When should I call the doctor?

- If symptoms do not improve after making diet and lifestyle changes, call your doctor.
- Call if your child is using over-the-counter medication for heartburn more than 2 times a week.
- Call if your child feels as if food is trapped behind the breastbone, if he vomits blood or has black stools, if he become short of breath, coughs, chokes, or is hoarse.
- Call your doctor if you have questions or concerns.

Quick Answers

- Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) is a digestive disorder that is also called heartburn and acid indigestion.
- Heartburn happens when acid from the stomach goes back up into the throat.
- Anyone can get heartburn, even infants and children. It is more common in the elderly, pregnant women, and children with disabilities.
- Heartburn is usually felt as a burning chest pain or pressure in the chest.
- Symptoms can usually be controlled by making diet and lifestyle changes.
- Symptoms can last as long as 2 hours. If left untreated, heartburn can lead to serious problems.
- To prevent heartburn, avoid food and drinks that can lead to heartburn, stop smoking, lose weight if needed, and avoid eating 2-3 hours before bedtime.
- If symptoms do not improve after making diet and lifestyle changes, call your doctor.

References

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