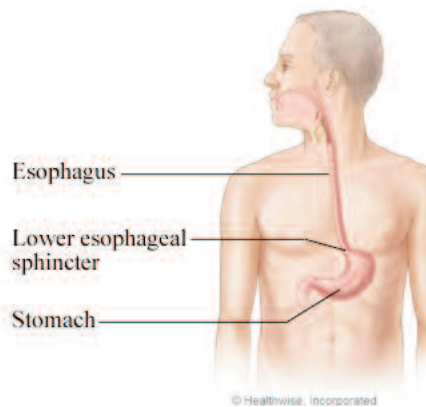




Following the home treatment tips can prevent most cases of heartburn.

What is Heartburn?

Heartburn occurs when stomach acid flows backward (acid reflux)—from the stomach into the tube (esophagus) that leads from the mouth to the stomach.



Discomfort from heartburn has nothing to do with the heart. Don't be concerned if you have heartburn sometimes. Nearly everyone does.

Symptoms

Heartburn may feel like a burning sensation, warmth, or heat under your breastbone. It can start in your chest or throat, and spread up your neck in waves. You may also get a sour taste in your mouth. The symptoms usually start after you eat and get worse when you lie down or bend over. Heartburn can last up to two hours or longer.

Who gets heartburn?

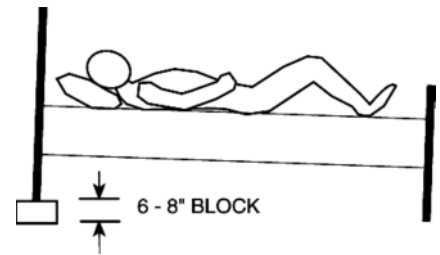
Heartburn can happen to both men and women. Pregnant women may get heartburn when the growing baby pushes on the stomach.

Prevention and home treatment

The good news is that heartburn can often be prevented with changes to your daily habits. Home treatments can be an effective way to lessen heartburn symptoms.

Try to:

- Eat smaller meals.
- Don't lie down for at least two to three hours after you eat. Lying down after eating lets the acid flow back into the esophagus.
- Stop smoking. Quitting smoking will often relieve heartburn completely.
- Lose a few pounds if you are overweight. Being overweight can make heartburn symptoms much worse.
- Raise the head of your bed about 6 to 8 inches. Try putting sturdy blocks under the bed frame legs.



- If you can't raise the head of your bed, try raising your upper body by putting a foam wedge under your head and shoulders.

Ways to help prevent heartburn

- Avoid medicines such as aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen or other anti-inflammatory drugs which can cause heartburn. Try acetaminophen (Tylenol) instead.
- Avoid foods such as chocolate, fatty or fried foods, peppermint or spearmint-flavored foods, coffee, alcohol, and carbonated drinks. These foods tend to make heartburn symptoms worse.
- Limit sour, bitter, or spicy foods. Certain citrus fruits and juices (orange and tomato juice) can irritate your esophagus.
- Wear loose clothing. Tight fitting belts or waistbands can squeeze the stomach and force food up against the lower esophagus.
- Reduce your stress. Stress can increase acid production and slow down the rate at which your stomach empties. This increases the risk of heartburn.

Medicines

If none of these suggestions help, you may want to consider taking an over-the-counter medicine. There are many different medicines to choose from. They can relieve heartburn, acid indigestion, and sour stomach, and most are available without a doctor's prescription.

Ask your doctor or pharmacist to recommend any of the following products:

- Antacids. These neutralize stomach acid. Examples include Maalox, Mylanta, Tums, and Gelusil.
- Acid reducers. These decrease the production of stomach acid. Examples include Pepcid AC, Tagamet HB, Zantac and Prilosec.

Keep in mind that these over-the-counter medicines are only a temporary solution. Your heartburn may come back if you take the medicine without doing some of the other home treatment suggestions.

Complications

If you experience acid reflux on a regular basis, you may have a condition called gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD). GERD can cause constant irritation of your esophagus lining, which can lead to other health problems. Contact your doctor if you have frequent heartburn and home treatments do not make you feel better.

When to seek emergency care

Call 911 anytime you think you may need emergency care*. For example, call if:

- You passed out (lost consciousness).
- You have chest pain or pressure. This may occur with:
 - Sweating
 - Shortness of breath
 - Nausea or vomiting
 - Pain that spreads from the chest to the neck, jaw, or one or both shoulders or arms
 - Feeling dizzy or lightheaded
 - A fast or uneven pulse

If you've had chest pain or pressure, after calling 911, chew 1 adult-strength aspirin. Wait for an ambulance. Do not try to drive yourself.

When to call Kaiser Permanente

You should call your doctor if:

- Your heartburn symptoms last for more than two weeks despite home treatment.
- You suspect that a medicine is causing heartburn.
- You vomit blood or what looks like coffee grounds.
- You pass maroon, black or bloody stools.
- You have pain or difficulty swallowing solid foods.
- You are losing weight and do not know why.

* If you have an emergency medical condition, call 911 or go to the nearest hospital.

An emergency medical condition is any of the following: (1) a medical condition that manifests itself by acute symptoms of sufficient severity (including severe pain) such that you could reasonably expect the absence of immediate medical attention to result in serious jeopardy to your health or body functions or organs; (2) active labor when there isn't enough time for safe transfer to a Plan hospital (or designated hospital) before delivery, or if transfer poses a threat to your (or your unborn child's) health and safety, or (3) a mental disorder that manifests itself by acute symptoms of sufficient severity such that either you are an immediate danger to yourself or others, or you are not immediately able to provide for, or use, food, shelter, or clothing, due to the mental disorder.

Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at kp.org to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and much more.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.