

# 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 condition and are a symptom of indigestion (dyspepsia). Various treatments are available over the counter (OTC).

## How can I prevent indigestion and heartburn?

- Reduce your current consumption of coffee, alcohol, chocolate, and fatty or spicy foods as these can make symptoms worse
- **Eat smaller, more frequent meals** and do not eat within 3 to 4 hours before going to bed
- **Lose weight** as reflux is more common in patients who are overweight
- **Stop smoking** - the chemicals can cause the muscle that separates your oesophagus from your stomach to relax, causing acid reflux
- **Find ways to relax** as stress and anxiety can worsen symptoms
- **Discuss** your anti-inflammatory painkillers (like ibuprofen) with your pharmacist or doctor as they can make indigestion worse
- **Prop** your head and shoulders up in bed or raise one end of your bed by 10 to 20cm to raise your chest and head above the level of your waist to stop stomach acid coming up while you sleep
- If you're pregnant, discuss your indigestion with your pharmacist or midwife who can recommend the safest OTC medicines
- For further information visit this website: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/heartburn-and-acid-reflux/>

## When shall I see a seek medical help?

- Lifestyle changes and pharmacy medicines aren't helping
- Heartburn most days for 3 weeks or more
- Other symptoms present, e.g. food getting stuck in your throat or frequently being sick
- Feeling like you have a lump in your stomach
- Persistent bad pain
- Aged 55 years of age or older
- Unintentional weight loss
- Difficulty swallowing (dysphagia)
- Diagnosed iron deficiency anaemia
- Bloody vomit or when you go to the toilet

