

What is Heartburn?

Heartburn, or acid indigestion, is an all too common experience for many Americans. The burning sensation or pain in the chest from heartburn can extend from the breastbone and move upward to the neck and throat, often leaving a bitter or acid taste. It often occurs after eating and can last up to two hours. According to the American Gastroenterological Association (AGA), heartburn is the most common symptom of a digestive disorder called Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD).

Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD) involves the stomach and esophagus (swallowing tube). Reflux refers to a flow back or return. It occurs when the stomach's contents, including acidic gastric juices, back up into the esophagus. In GERD, the sphincter muscle connecting the stomach to the esophagus is weak or relaxes abnormally and does not close to prevent this back flow into the esophagus. This muscle is called the lower esophageal sphincter (LES).

Some heartburn sufferers also experience a sore throat, hoarseness, chronic cough, asthma, and a feeling of a lump in the throat. Because there can be pain in the chest, heartburn sometimes may be mistaken for heart disease or a heart attack. Heartburn may not be a sign of a serious problem, but if it occurs more than twice a week for six months or longer or is not relieved by treatment, it should be reported to your doctor for further examination.

How Common is Heartburn?

More than 60 million people experience heartburn at least once a month and 25 million suffer daily. About 50% of pregnant women experience heartburn at least once a month and about 25% report symptoms daily. Infants and children can also have heartburn, which may result in vomiting, coughing and other respiratory problems.

Nighttime Heartburn Can Be More Severe Than Daytime Heartburn

Of heartburn sufferers, about 80% experience **nighttime heartburn**; most reporting it to be severe according to a recent Gallup survey. When sleeping and in the prone position, there is more pressure on the esophagus and the esophagus is less able to clear the acid reflux. Also, the body does not produce the bicarbonate-rich saliva that helps fight stomach acid.

Because acid may linger longer in the esophagus at night, nighttime heartburn can also lead to inflammation, scarring and can put you at risk for asthma, and in rare cases, cancer.

The discomfort associated with heartburn can rob you of precious hours of sleep, which are important to daytime functioning and

your overall health and safety. In this same survey, 75% of respondents reported that nighttime heartburn keeps them from falling asleep and wakes them up during sleep - while 63% stated that it actually affected their ability to get a good night's sleep.

Many Treatments Are Available

LIFESTYLE

Because lifestyle and diet can lead to heartburn, the following treatments may help prevent, minimize or alleviate the discomfort:

- Avoid eating meals two to three hours before bedtime to reduce stomach acid and allow the stomach to partially empty its contents. Smaller portions, especially late in the day, may also help control symptoms.

● Avoid food, beverages and medicines that weaken the LES muscle and may damage the esophageal lining: These include:

- Chocolate
- Peppermint
- Fried and fatty foods
- Coffee
- Carbonated beverages
- Alcoholic beverages
- Citrus fruits and juices
- Tomato products
- Pepper
- Vinegar
- Ketchup and mustard

● Chew gum as it boosts saliva production and allows quicker and more efficient neutralization of acid in the esophagus.

- Lose weight, if overweight.
- Stop or decrease smoking to help the LES muscle work better.
- Elevate the head of the bed by four to six inches by using pillows or a specially designed wedge. This will minimize reflux of the stomach contents into the esophagus.
- Recent studies indicate that sleeping on your left side may reduce heartburn.

MEDICATIONS

Most (72%) of those participating in the Gallup survey have used medications to control heartburn and more than 60% agree that if left untreated, heartburn can cause serious medical problems.

When to See Your Doctor

If you have tried lifestyle changes or an over-the-counter antacid and:

- symptoms persist, are severe or occur more than twice a week, or
- heartburn makes it difficult to fall asleep or wakes you at night, see your primary care doctor or a gastroenterologist. Many tests and procedures are available to examine and identify the best treatments for people with chronic heartburn.

FOR SHORT-TERM RELIEF: OTC (OVER-THE-COUNTER) NON-PRESCRIPTION MEDICATIONS

Medication	Purpose	Notes	Examples
Antacids	Heartburn- <u>relief</u> by neutralizing acid in the esophagus and stomach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide temporary or partial relief • Some people may combine with a foaming agent such as alginic acid — a barrier to reflux • Excessive use can lead to side effects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gelusil® • Maalox® • Mylanta® • Roloids® • Tums®
H2 Receptor Blockers	<u>Reduce</u> acid by inhibiting its production in the stomach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective at night • OTC's are half the strength of prescription version • Take 30 minutes to work, but last longer than antacids 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Axid® AR • Pepcid® AC • Tagamet HB® • Zantac 75®

IF HEARTBURN BECOMES CHRONIC: PRESCRIPTION MEDICATIONS (PRESCRIBED BY A DOCTOR)

Medication	Purpose	Notes	Examples
H2 Receptor Blockers	Further <u>reduce</u> acid production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Few side effects • Prescription strengths double that of examples above 	Prescription-strength of examples above
Proton Pump Inhibitors	Further <u>reduce</u> acid by inhibiting an enzyme that produces acid in the stomach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Few side effects • Strongest medication available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aciphex™ • Nexium™ • Prevacid® • Prilosec® • Protonix®



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The Nighttime Heartburn Relief Effort

The Nighttime Heartburn Relief Effort is an initiative aimed at bringing important messages about nighttime heartburn to Americans, and educating physicians and their patients about the potential dangers associated with nighttime heartburn, as well as treatment options. The program was launched in response to a recent survey conducted for the American Gastroenterological Association by the Gallup Organization, under an unrestricted educational grant from Wyeth-Ayerst Pharmaceuticals. The survey — the most comprehensive to date on nighttime heartburn — examined prevalence, severity, and sufferers' satisfaction with current treatments and attitudes toward the condition.

For more information on nighttime heartburn or to find a gastroenterologist in your area, log onto the AGA's website, at www.gastro.org, or call AGA at 1-877-GUT-9800.



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RELIEF
EFFORT**

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Nighttime Heartburn



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Millions of Americans
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