

INDIGESTION AND REFLUX

Indigestion (dyspepsia) is pain or discomfort felt in your stomach or inside your ribcage. Other symptoms include feeling 'full up' soon after starting to eat, bloating, belching or passing wind, feeling sick, or being sick (vomiting).

Acid reflux is when acid moves up from your stomach into your oesophagus (the tube that leads from your mouth to your stomach). The acid may inflame the lining of your oesophagus and cause heartburn (a burning feeling behind your breastbone). You may also get a bitter taste at the back of your throat.

Indigestion and heartburn can occur together or on their own. Both are common problems that affect most people at some point. Most cases will be mild and happen only occasionally.

Indigestion is usually related to eating. When you eat, your stomach produces acid which can sometimes irritate your stomach lining and other parts of your gut, causing a burning feeling. Factors that trigger or make indigestion worse include: stress or anxiety, pregnancy, being overweight, smoking, drinking excess amounts of alcohol, and ulcers in your stomach or small intestine.

Some medicines can cause indigestion as a side effect. These include anti-inflammatory medicines such as aspirin, ibuprofen and diclofenac. Other medicines, such as bisphosphonates, nitrates or steroids, can cause or make indigestion worse. Your pharmacist can help you decide whether your medicine is affecting your indigestion.

How can I treat indigestion and reflux?

Sometimes, simple diet and lifestyle changes may be enough to make you feel better (see What else can help? section). You can also buy medicines from your pharmacy, without a prescription, that will help. Ask your pharmacist which medicines would be best for you.

Antacids act to make you feel better quickly. They help to neutralise the acid made by your stomach. Their ingredients include: aluminium hydroxide, magnesium carbonate and magnesium trisilicate. They come in various brands as chewable tablets or liquids. Your pharmacist can tell you which would be best for you. Always follow the instructions on the packet.

Alginates, for example, Peptac or Gaviscon Advance, work inside your stomach, to form a sort of jelly. This jelly floats on top of the stomach contents and helps to stop acid moving out from the stomach. After a few hours, your body will get rid of the jelly as if it were food. Take these medicines after food and at bedtime.

If antacids or alginates don't relieve your symptoms, you may be able to take a **proton pump inhibitor (PPI)** such as omeprazole or lansoprazole. PPIs reduce the amount of acid in your stomach. Check with your pharmacist that taking the PPI will not affect any other medicines you may be taking.

Some people don't need to take a PPI every day and take it only when they have symptoms. Once you feel better (often after a few days or weeks), you can stop using it. However, ask your pharmacist for advice first.

Some people find that when they stop taking their PPI their symptoms seem worse. To help with this you may want to take an alginate. If you still have symptoms, reduce the dose of your PPI towards the end of your treatment course; for example, take it every other day for the last week.

Only adults can be given PPIs under the Common Ailments Service; your pharmacy will only supply you with a PPI for up to 4 weeks.

If you are pregnant and lifestyle changes haven't helped, then an antacid and/or an alginate may work.

What else can help?

Making changes to your lifestyle:

- choose healthy foods and avoid fatty, spicy foods, chocolate and coffee
- eat smaller meals
- have your main meal no later than 3 to 4 hours before you go to bed
- lose weight if you are overweight
- drink less alcohol
- stop smoking
- try raising the head of your bed – by putting books or bricks under the feet of the bed at the head end, or prop your head and shoulders up with a couple of pillows.

Do I need to see my doctor?

See your doctor if:

- you're under 18 years old
- you're over 55 years old with indigestion that does not go away
- your indigestion can't be explained, or doesn't get better when you treat it
- you have sticky, black poo, or blood in your sick or poo
- you are losing weight without meaning to, or you have lost your appetite for no reason
- swallowing is becoming difficult for you
- your tummy is swollen
- you keep being sick (vomiting)
- you're short of breath and often feel tired – you may have anaemia.

Where can I find further information?

Patient UK: www.patient.info

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk

Self Care Forum: www.selfcareforum.org

NHS Direct Wales Tel: 0845 4647 (open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Calls from landlines and mobiles cost 2p per minute, in addition to telephone providers access charge.