

HEARTBURN

Heartburn, that unpleasant burning sensation or discomfort above your stomach and in your chest, is caused by acid reflux. This basically means that the acid in the stomach is washing back up into the esophagus causing irritation and discomfort. In its more severe and chronic form, heartburn is associated with Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease, also known as GERD.

What causes heartburn?

- Ineffective closing of the valve between the stomach and the esophagus. During digestion, this valve called the "Lower Esophageal Sphincter" should close in order to prevent stomach acid from splashing back up into the esophagus.
- Stomach infection with *Helicobacter pylori*, a bacterium that invades human stomachs.
- Over-eating. Large meals expand the stomach and increase upward pressure against the esophageal sphincter.
- Food allergies or food sensitivities disrupt the normal process of digestion and can result in heartburn.
- Certain foods may irritate the stomach and also prevent proper closing of the esophageal sphincter.

Ways to Decrease Discomfort and Promote Healing:

- Eat smaller meals more frequently,

rather than 2 large meals.

- Avoid foods that commonly cause heartburn: alcohol, caffeinated beverages, processed flour and grain products, high-sugar foods, fried and fatty foods, chocolate, peppermint, tomato sauces, milk, spicy foods, orange juice.
- Identify food sensitivities, intolerances or allergies as they can underlie reflux disease.
- Don't lie down for two hours after eating. Gravity helps to keep the stomach juices from backing up into the esophagus.
- Maintain a healthy body weight. Obesity increases abdominal pressure, which can push stomach contents up into the esophagus.
- Don't smoke. Nicotine makes reflux worse because it decreases the tone of the lower esophageal sphincter.
- Relax. Stress can trigger heartburn.
- Know your medications. Heartburn can be worsened by aspirin.
- Keep a heartburn journal to record what triggered your heartburn. This will help to determine what lifestyle changes you'll need to make.
- There are also specific nutrients and herbs that aid healing an irritated stomach.

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