

Heartburn

DESCRIPTION

Heartburn is a burning sensation in the chest behind the breastbone or lower esophagus. It is caused by the reflux of stomach contents (including hydrochloric acid) into the lower portion of the esophagus. Contrary to popular belief, excess stomach acid is not the culprit in most cases of heartburn. In fact, it is a lack of stomach acid that most often causes the condition.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Insufficient HCl production can be the result of several factors: genetic predisposition, chronic overeating, vitamin deficiencies, or regular use of antacids. However, the result is the same—gastric distress. The development and increasing severity of heartburn can result from many causes, including inadequate chewing; swallowing large amounts of air while eating; insufficient water intake; poor food combining; overeating; consuming coffee, tea, carbonated drinks, alcoholic beverages and chocolate, as well as fatty, fried, and spicy foods; eating too rapidly or while upset; and lying down after eating. Other factors may include pregnancy, overweight, stress, excessive smoking, constipation, the use of aspirin and ibuprofen, wearing tight-fitting clothing (which constricts the abdomen), ulcers, gallbladder problems, allergies, enzyme and vitamin deficiencies, and hiatus hernia (a condition in which the upper portion of the stomach protrudes into the chest cavity through an opening in the diaphragm).

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of heartburn may include:

- Abdominal distention after eating
- Flatulence and belching
- Nausea
- Sense of over-fullness after eating
- Burning sensation in the esophagus
- Upper abdominal pain

STEPS TO ADDRESS HEARTBURN

1. **CHANGE YOUR DIET.** Consume foods in combinations that are easy on your digestive system. For example, eat meat with vegetables instead of starches, or eat starches with vegetables. Eat fruits alone or not at all. Don't overeat. It takes 20 minutes after eating before you feel full; stop eating before you are full. Reduce the amount of fatty and fried foods that you eat. Eat slowly, and chew your food thoroughly. Do not drink a lot during meals, as this dilutes the HCl and makes digestion less efficient.
2. **AVOID CERTAIN BEVERAGES.** Eliminate or reduce your intake of coffee, tea, carbonated beverages, and alcohol.
3. **DRINK PLENTY OF WATER.** Drink at least half your body weight in ounces each day (For example, a 120-pound person would require 60 ounces of water, or seven tall glasses).
4. **DO NOT LIE DOWN IMMEDIATELY AFTER EATING.** Avoid lying down immediately after eating, and when you do go to bed, sleep with the upper portion of your body slightly elevated (at least four to six inches).
5. **WEAR LOOSE CLOTHING.** Loosen tight clothes or belts while eating.
6. **LIMIT INTAKE OF ASPIRIN and NSAIDs.**
7. **TAKE DIGESTIVE ENZYMES.** Instead of taking antacids following meals, take digestive enzymes (that include HCl) prior to eating.
8. **INCREASE FIBER INTAKE.** Add more fiber to your diet ensure regularity.