Managing Heartburn

Colorado State University

Heartburn occurs when stomach contents back up through your esophagus, which is the tube that goes from your mouth to your stomach. You can sometimes taste food or fluid in the back of your mouth, and the stomach acid that comes with it often causes a burning sensation. It is a common problem that can occur at any age, but frequent heartburn can cause damage to your esophagus. Frequent heartburn is usually referred to as **G**astro**e**sophageal **R**eflux **D**isease, or "GERD."

What causes heartburn?
There are a variety of factors that contribute to heartburn, but sometimes the cause is unknown. It occurs more often in pregnant women, smokers, and people who are obese. It can also be caused by a hiatal hernia.

How should I treat heartburn?
Medication is sometimes necessary, but there are also some changes you can make to your diet and lifestyle that may reduce your symptoms:

- Lose weight, if you are overweight.
- Don't wear tight clothing, especially across your stomach.
- Remain upright for a few hours after eating.
- Raise the head of your bed by securing it onto blocks. Pillows can also raise your head, but usually cause you to bend in a way that increases pressure on your stomach, which can make symptoms worse.
- Avoid large meals, especially meals that are high in fat and protein.
- Take your time with meals. Sit down to eat, and eat slowly.
- Keep track of your diet and symptoms. This might help you identify foods that cause problems.
- Limit foods that cause symptoms. These are different for everyone, but common culprits are:
    - Acidic foods like citrus and tomatoes
    - Spicy food
    - Onions or garlic
    - Chocolate
    - Greasy or fried food
    - Caffeine and alcohol
    - Mints or mint-flavored products
    - Carbonated drinks

Frequent heartburn can cause serious complications if left untreated. *If you have heartburn often, it is important to see your doctor for proper treatment.*