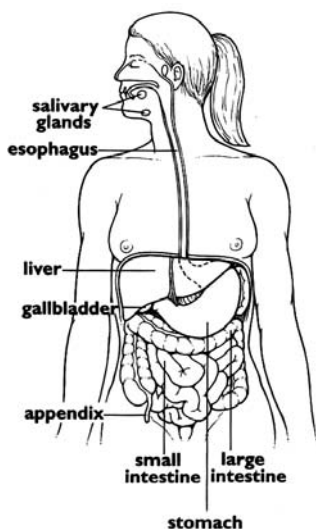




Following the home treatment tips can prevent most cases of heartburn.

## What is Heartburn?

Heartburn happens if there is an abnormal backflow of stomach acid (acid reflux) into the tube (esophagus) that leads from the mouth to the stomach. Don't be concerned if you have heartburn every now and then. Nearly everyone does.



## Symptoms

Heartburn may feel like a burning sensation, warmth, or heat under your breastbone. It can start in your chest or throat, and spread up your neck in waves. You may also get a sour taste in your mouth. The symptoms usually start after you eat and get worse when you lie down or bend over. Heartburn can last up to two hours or longer

## Who gets heartburn?

Heartburn can happen to both men and women. Pregnant women usually get heartburn when the growing baby pushes on the stomach.

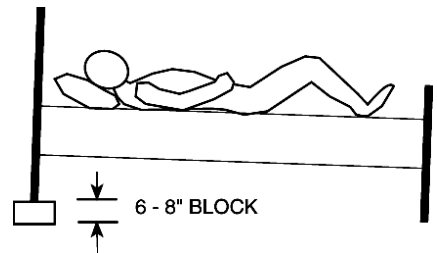
## Prevention and home treatment

The good news is that heartburn can usually be prevented with home treatments. Home treatments are an effective way to lessen heartburn symptoms.

Try to:

- Eat smaller meals.
- Avoid late night snacks.
- Don't lie down for at least two to three hours after you eat. Lying down after eating lets the acid flow back into the esophagus.
- Stop smoking. Quitting smoking will often relieve heartburn completely.
- Lose a few pounds if you are overweight. Being overweight can actually make heartburn symptoms much worse.

- Raise the head of your bed about 6 to 8 inches. Try putting sturdy blocks under the bed frame legs.



- If you can't raise your bed, try raising your head (and upper body) by putting a foam wedge under your head and shoulders.

## Ways to help prevent heartburn

- Avoid medicines such as aspirin, ibuprofen, motrin, naproxen or other anti-inflammatory drugs which can cause heartburn. Try acetaminophen (Tylenol) instead.
- Avoid certain foods such as chocolate, fatty or fried foods, peppermint or spearmint-flavored foods, coffee, alcohol, and carbonated drinks. These foods tend to make heartburn symptoms worse.
- Limit sour or bitter foods. Certain citrus fruits and juices (orange and tomato juice) can irritate your esophagus.
- Limit spicy foods. Spicy foods can also make heartburn symptoms worse.
- Wear loose clothing. Tight fitting belts or waistbands can squeeze the stomach and force food up against the lower esophagus.

- Reduce your stress. Stress can increase acid production and slow down the rate at which your stomach empties. This increases the risk of heartburn.

## Medicines

If none of these home remedies help, you may want to consider taking an over-the-counter medicine. There are many different medicines to choose from. They can relieve heartburn, acid indigestion, and sour stomach, and most are available without a doctor's prescription.

Ask your doctor or pharmacist to recommend any of the following products:

- Antacids. These neutralize stomach acid. Some examples include Maalox, Mylanta, Tums, and Gelusil.
- Acid blockers. These reduce the production of stomach acid. Some examples include Pepcid AC, Tagamet HB, and Zantac.

Keep in mind that these over-the-counter medicines are only a temporary solution. Your heartburn may come back if you take the medicine without doing some of the other home treatment suggestions.

## Complications

If you experience acid reflux on a regular basis, you may have a condition called gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD). GERD can

cause constant irritation of your esophagus lining, which can lead to other health problems. Contact your doctor if you have frequent heartburn and if home treatments do not make you feel better.

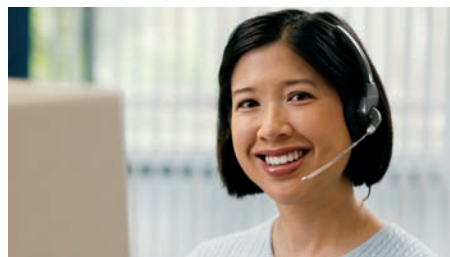
## When to seek emergency care

You should seek emergency care \* if your heartburn symptoms happen along with:

- Pain in the upper belly (abdomen) with chest pain that is crushing or squeezing, feels like a heavy weight on your chest, or occurs with any other symptoms of a heart attack.

Signs of shock, including:

- Cool, pale, clammy skin
- Weak, rapid pulse
- Shallow, rapid breathing
- Low blood pressure
- Thirst, nausea, or vomiting
- Confusion or anxiety
- Faintness, weakness, dizziness, or loss of consciousness



## When to call Kaiser Permanente

You should call your doctor if:

- Your heartburn symptoms last for more than two weeks despite home treatment.

- There is blood in your vomit or stools.
  - You suspect that a medicine is causing heartburn.
  - You have pain or difficulty swallowing solid foods.
- \* If you have an emergency medical condition, call 911 or go to the nearest hospital. An emergency medical condition is (1) a medical or psychiatric condition that manifests itself by acute symptoms of sufficient severity (including severe pain) such that you could reasonably expect the absence of immediate medical attention to result in serious jeopardy to your health or body functions or organs; or (2) active labor when there isn't enough time for safe transfer to a Plan hospital (or designated hospital) before delivery, or if transfer poses a threat to your (or your unborn child's) health and safety.

## Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at [kp.org](http://kp.org) to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and much more.
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.