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| The reason most people feel discomfort in their chest due to heartburn is because of their eating habits. "Most often, the predisposing culprit [to weakening the sphincter] is your dietary pattern," (Carper 147). Certain foods have a tendency to relax the sphincter muscle and make heartburn a more frequent occurrence. Some of these foods are chocolate, peppermint, coffee, alcohol, and raw onions. Other foods such as citrus and spicy foods have a tendency to irritate the esophagus and can trigger the burning sensation without weakening the sphincter (Carper 154). Coffee drinkers tend to experience Acid Reflux more commonly because of the chemicals in coffee. Coffee is a stimulant and can over stimulate the esophageal sphincter. This allows random movement of the muscle and therefore acidic fluids to be pushed back up into he esophagus. Also, people who are overweight tend to experience more heartburn than those people who have an average weight. Pressure can build up on the esophageal sphincter when a person is overweight and cause the muscle to slip open, especially after meals, allowing acid and Chyme from the stomach up into the esophagus (What is). Eating habits play a large role in the onset of Acid Reflux, but there are other factors that can trigger heartburn.  Smokers and women who become pregnant are also greatly affected by heartburn. The chemicals in cigarettes and other tobacco products tend to be relaxants that can affect the sharpness of movement of the sphincter muscle (What is). This muscle becomes relaxed easily by tobacco and in turn, does not do its job to the highest capability and allows for Chyme to flow through. In pregnant women, the added pressure of a fetus upon the stomach and lungs makes heartburn a more common occurrence. 25 percent of pregnant women experience heartburn every day, while 50 percent have occasional occurrences of heartburn (What is).  Overall, 40 percent of the world�s population experience heartburn and Acid Reflux (What is). This number includes infants, children, adolescents, and adults. Although it is a common affliction and sometimes only a temporary one, acid reflux should always be taken seriously since it may lead to more serious conditions.  For example, acid indigestion and heartburn is not only very painful, but it can be a symptom of a more serious gastrointestinal disorder (Wolfe 113). In The Fire Inside, Dr. Wolfe described a patient who had reoccurring heartburn for many years, but just took antacids to treat it. He began to complain of difficulty breathing. It was soon discovered that the patient had lung cancer that had stemmed from a condition known as Barrett�s Esophagus (Wolfe 114). This condition progressed into esophageal cancer, which metastasized into lung cancer. Barrett�s Esophagus is a condition that can develop from chronic Gastro Esophageal Reflux Disease. The normal cells that line the esophagus, called squamous cells, turn into a columnar cell, which is not usually found in humans. (Healthlink). Wolfe feels if he had been able to properly treat the patients condition he might have been able to prevent his death.  Although Dr Wolfe described an extreme example of acid indigestion, acid reflux can lead to other non-fatal, but serious problems if left untreated. Heartburn is also a known symptom of a Hiatus Hernia, which is a condition where a small part of the stomach protrudes into the diaphragm and into the chest. This condition can be fixed by surgery; however, if left untreated is very painful (Balch 21).  Another problem associated with heartburn and acid indigestion is Dysphagia, or difficulty in swallowing (BDF). Acid reflux can lead to inflammation of the esophagus, which in turn causes difficulty in swallowing. Dysphagia can also be a sign of other serious problems, like myasthenia gravis or esophageal cancer. (Belch 19) Myasthenia Gravis is a condition where the immune system attacks the receptors that lie on the muscle side of the neuromuscular junction (Merrick 333).  High concentrations of stomach acid that are associated with heartburn can also lead to esophageal ulcers which are caused by repeated regurgitation of stomach acid into the esophagus. This also causes swelling of the esophagus, which is a condition known as esophagistis (Merrick 496).  [<-----Back](http://docs.google.com/intro%201) [Next----->](http://docs.google.com/intro3.html)  [[Home](http://docs.google.com/home.html)][[Introduction](http://docs.google.com/introduction.html)][[Hypothesis](http://docs.google.com/hypothesis.html)][[Procedure](http://docs.google.com/procedure.html)][[Data](http://docs.google.com/data.html)][[Conclusions](http://docs.google.com/conclusions.html)][[Bilio/Links](http://docs.google.com/biblio.html)]  [[2001 Projects](http://docs.google.com/index.html)][[2000 Projects](http://docs.google.com/AP2000/index.html)][[1999 Projects](http://docs.google.com/AP99/index.html)][[1998 Projects](http://docs.google.com/AP98/index.html)] |