

Heartburn and acid reflux

Heartburn is a burning feeling in your chest. It's caused by stomach acid moving up towards your throat (acid reflux). If it keeps happening, it's called gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD).

Symptoms of acid reflux

The main symptoms of acid reflux are:

- heartburn - a burning feeling in your chest
- an unpleasant sour taste in your mouth, caused by stomach acid

You may also have:

- a cough or hiccups that keep coming back
- a hoarse voice
- bad breath
- bloating and nausea (feeling sick)

Symptoms are often worse after you eat, lie down or bend over.

Causes of heartburn and acid reflux

Lots of people get heartburn from time to time. There's often no obvious reason why.

Sometimes it's caused or made worse by:

- some food and drink - such as coffee, tomatoes, alcohol, chocolate and fatty or spicy foods
- carrying extra weight
- smoking
- pregnancy
- stress and anxiety
- some medicines, such [as anti-inflammatory painkillers \(such as ibuprofen\)](#)
- a [hiatus hernia](#) - when part of your stomach moves up into your chest

Preventing heartburn and acid reflux

Simple lifestyle changes can help stop or reduce heartburn.

Do

- ✓ eat smaller meals often
- ✓ try to lose weight if you're carrying extra weight
- ✓ if you are stressed, try to find [ways to relax](#)
- ✓ raise the top of your bed to stop the flow of acid into your throat

Use wood, bricks or books to raise the head of your bed by around 10cm to 20cm. Do not use extra pillows, as this can put pressure on your tummy and make your symptoms worse.

Don't

- ✗ do not have food or drink that may trigger your symptoms - such as coffee, alcohol or chocolate
- ✗ do not eat for 3 or 4 hours before you go to bed
- ✗ do not wear clothes that are tight around your waist
- ✗ do not smoke - [get help to quit smoking](#)
- ✗ do not drink [too much alcohol](#)
- ✗ do not stop taking any prescribed medicine without speaking to your GP first

When to see a pharmacist

Speak to a pharmacist for advice if you keep getting heartburn.

They can recommend medicines called [antacids](#).

These can help ease your symptoms. It's best to take them with food or soon after eating. This is when you're most likely to get heartburn. They may also work for longer if you take them with food.

Contact your GP if:

- lifestyle changes and medicines you get without a prescription are not helping
- you have heartburn most days for 3 weeks or more
- you have other symptoms, such as food getting stuck in your throat, getting sick often or [losing weight for no obvious reason](#)

Your GP can give you stronger treatments and rule out more serious causes.

Treating heartburn and acid reflux

Your GP may prescribe a medicine called a proton pump inhibitor (PPI). This reduces how much acid your stomach makes. PPIs include [omeprazole](#) and [lansoprazole](#).

You'll usually need to take this type of medicine for 4 or 8 weeks, depending on how serious your acid reflux is.

Go back to the GP if your symptoms come back after you stop taking your medicine. You may need a long-term prescription.

Tests and surgery for heartburn and acid reflux

If medicines do not help or your symptoms are severe, your GP may refer you to a specialist for:

- tests to find out what's causing your symptoms, such as a gastroscopy (a thin tube with a camera to look inside your throat and stomach)
- an operation on your stomach to stop acid reflux - called a laparoscopic fundoplication

Content supplied by the [NHS](#) and adapted for Ireland by the HSE

Sláintecare.

This project has received funding from the Government of Ireland's Sláintecare Integration Fund 2019 under Grant Agreement Number 123.

HSE Live - we're here to help

Monday to Friday: 8am to 8pm

Saturday: 9am to 5pm

Sunday: Closed

Bank holidays: Closed

Freephone: [1800 700 700](tel:1800700700)

From outside Ireland: [00 353 1 240 8787](tel:0035312408787)

[HSE Facebook](#)

[HSE Instagram](#)

[HSE TikTok](#)

[HSE YouTube](#)

[HSE LinkedIn](#)

[HSE X \(Twitter\)](#)

[Complaints and feedback](#)

[Emergencies](#)

[Cookie settings](#)

[Cookie statement](#)

[Accessibility](#)

[Privacy statement](#)

[Disclaimer](#)

© Health Service Executive