**Heartburn** plagues most moms-to-be at some point because progesterone, the hormone that relaxes muscles in **pregnancy**, also relaxes the stomach valve that keeps acid out of the esophagus. In addition, the growing uterus crowds the stomach, forcing acid into the esophagus.

## Lately I've felt a burning sensation in my chest after eating. Is it heartburn?

Most likely. Many women experience heartburn for the first time during pregnancy — and though it's common and generally harmless, it can be quite uncomfortable.

Heartburn (also called acid indigestion or acid reflux) is a burning sensation that often extends from the bottom of the breastbone to the lower throat. It's caused by some of the hormonal and physical changes in your body.

During pregnancy, the placenta produces the hormone progesterone, which relaxes the smooth muscles of the uterus. This hormone also relaxes the valve that separates the esophagus from the stomach, allowing gastric acids to seep back up, which causes that unpleasant burning sensation.

Progesterone also slows down the wavelike contractions of your esophagus and intestines, making digestion sluggish. Later in pregnancy, your growing baby crowds your abdominal cavity, pushing the stomach acids back up into the esophagus.

Many women start experiencing heartburn and other [gastrointestinal discomforts](http://www.babycenter.com/0_gas-and-bloating-during-pregnancy_247.bc) in the second half of pregnancy. Unfortunately, it usually comes and goes until your baby is born.

Many women experience heartburn during pregnancy. Learn why heartburn happens and how to find relief. [See all pregnancy videos](http://www.babycenter.com/video/pregnancy)

## What can I do about it?

Though you may not be able to eliminate heartburn entirely, you can take steps to minimize your discomfort:

* Avoid food and beverages that cause you gastrointestinal distress. The usual suspects are carbonated drinks; [alcohol](http://www.babycenter.com/0_drinking-alcohol-during-pregnancy_3542.bc) (which you should avoid anyway during pregnancy); [caffeine](http://www.babycenter.com/caffeine-during-pregnancy); chocolate; acidic foods like citrus fruits and juices, tomatoes, mustard, and vinegar; processed meats; mint products; and spicy, highly seasoned, fried, or fatty foods.
* Don't eat big meals. Instead, eat several small meals throughout the day. Take your time eating and chew thoroughly.
* Avoid drinking large quantities of fluids during meals — you don't want to distend your stomach. (It's important to drink plenty of water daily during pregnancy, but sip it between meals.)
* Try chewing gum after eating. Chewing gum stimulates your salivary glands, and saliva can help neutralize acid.
* Don't eat close to bedtime. Give yourself two to three hours to digest before you lie down.
* Sleep propped up with several pillows or a wedge. Elevating your upper body will help keep your stomach acids where they belong and will aid your digestion.
* Gain a [healthy amount of weight](http://www.babycenter.com/0_pregnancy-weight-gain-what-to-expect_1466.bc), and stay within the guidelines your healthcare provider suggests.
* Wear loose, comfortable clothing. Avoid any tightness around your waist and tummy.
* Bend at the knees instead of at the waist.
* Don't smoke. In addition to contributing to a host of serious health problems, smoking boosts stomach acidity. (Ideally, smoking is a habit you should break before getting pregnant. If you're still smoking and are having [trouble quitting](http://www.babycenter.com/0_quitting-smoking-during-pregnancy-five-keys-to-success_1405724.bc), ask your caregiver for a referral to a [smoking-cessation program](http://www.babycenter.com/0_quitting-smoking-during-pregnancy-compare-your-options_1406034.bc).)
* An [over-the-counter antacid](http://www.babycenter.com/404_which-heartburn-medicines-are-safe-during-pregnancy_1440876.bc) that contains magnesium or calcium may ease discomfort, but check with your prenatal caregiver before taking one, because some brands contain aluminum or& [aspirin](http://www.babycenter.com/404_is-it-safe-to-take-aspirin-during-pregnancy_1357403.bc) or are high in sodium.

If these measures don't help, talk to your caregiver about prescription [heartburn medications that are safe during pregnancy](http://www.babycenter.com/404_which-heartburn-medicines-are-safe-during-pregnancy_1440876.bc).

5 Ways to Reduce Heartburn During Pregnancy

It was heartburn that got me in the end. I could take the swelling, the back pain, the constant trips to the bathroom, the itchy skin, the fatigue, the sweating, the sleeplessness and even the psychological shock of seeing the scale tip 200 pounds. But the constant, searing pain of heartburn made the miracle of pregnancy seem more like a curse—by the middle of my third trimester, my mantra had changed from "Please, let him be healthy!" to "Just get him OUT!"

That fiery sensation known as heartburn happens when the lower esophageal sphincter (LES), a muscle responsible for keeping stomach contents in their place, begins to relax or leak. this allows stomach acids to flow upward into the esophagus, explains Suzanne Trupin, M.D., CEO of Women's Health Practice of Champaign, Ill.

Pregnant women are prime candidates for two reasons: First, the [hormone relaxin](http://www.fitpregnancy.com/pregnancy/pregnancy-health/hormone-handbook)—busy limbering up your joints and connective tissue for an easier delivery—slows your digestion, meaning food stays in your stomach longer and triggers more acid production. Second, your growing baby exerts pressure on both the stomach and the LES, increasing the chance that acids will be pushed up into the esophagus.

**So what's an expectant mother to do? Follow these five tips to relieve the pain:**

1. Eat Less, More Often Overeating exacerbates heartburn, says rachel Brandeis, M.S., a registered dietitian in Atlanta who specializes in prenatal nutrition. "When you're pregnant, there's less room for your stomach to expand," she explains. and maintaining a sensible diet will not only stave off heartburn in the short term, but throughout your pregnancy as well, because gaining more than the recommended weight puts more pressure on your abdomen, which can trigger the condition. instead of three meals a day, aim for six mini-meals ([See "Mini-Size Me"](http://www.fitpregnancy.com/nutrition/prenatal-nutrition/5-ways-reduce-heartburn-during-pregnancy?page=2)) of no more than 1½ cups of food each, Brandeis recommends. Smaller meals are easier for your body to digest.

2. Eliminate Trigger Foods Identify the foods that intensify your heartburn and banish them from your diet. While there are no universally "banned" foods, common heartburn triggers include acidic foods, such as citrus fruits and tomatoes, greasy or fried foods, spicy foods, chocolate, coffee and carbonated beverages and alcohol (which, as you well know, you should eliminate anyway!).

3. Focus on Fluids "Liquid-y foods are less likely to cause problems than solids, since they move through the stomach more quickly," Brandeis says. Soups, [smoothies](http://www.fitpregnancy.com/nutrition/prenatal-nutrition/quick-healthy-smoothie-recipes-pregnancy), yogurt, milkshakes, protein shakes and puddings are good choices. Look for liquids that offer plenty of protein, such as milk and drinkable yogurt. and aim to make solids a little less so: "chew solid foods slowly and extremely well, until they're almost liquefied," Brandeis adds. Make quick and healthy smoothies in a flash at [fitpregnancy.com/smoothies](http://www.fitpregnancy.com/nutrition/prenatal-nutrition/quick-healthy-smoothie-recipes-pregnancy).

4. Sleep Smart To avoid [nighttime heartburn](http://www.fitpregnancy.com/pregnancy/pregnancy-health/sleep-baby), don't eat anything for at least three hours before bedtime. Elevate the head of your bed by placing books under the legs, and if you're not already sleeping on your left side, start now; stomach acids will have to travel uphill to reach the esophagus—no easy feat!

5. Time for Tums It's fine to find relief in a bottle of tums or rolaids or other calcium- containing antacids. However, "too much calcium can block iron absorption, so don't take tums at the same time you take your prenatal vitamin," Brandeis advises. By the time i gave birth, i estimate i'd ingested my own considerable body weight in tums. This overuse created calcium overload, which may have exacerbated my anemia. acids 10 times a day (or more—as i was), talk to your doctor: she may want to check for ulcers or a hiatal hernia (where part of the stomach protrudes into the chest cavity), or prescribe medication.

Also, avoid antacids that list aluminum (such as aluminum hydroxide or aluminum carbonate) as an ingredient; it can cause constipation and can even be toxic in large doses. remedies containing aspirin (such as alka-seltzer) should also be avoided during pregnancy; look for salicylate or acetylsalicylic acid in ingredients lists. You don't want an antacid containing sodium bicarbonate (baking soda) or sodium citrate, either. Both are high in sodium, which causes water retention.

Mini-Size Me Here's a sample of what a day's worth of small, healthful meals looks like:

1 cup of oatmeal with nonfat milk and 1 apple

1 cup of yogurt with fruit

½ peanut butter and jelly sandwich and 1 cup of vegetable soup

1 handful of whole-grain crackers and 1 ounce of your favorite hard cheese

2 ounces of chicken, ½ cup of mashed sweet potatoes and ½ cup of cottage cheese with fruit