

# TIME TO EXTINGUISH HEARTBURN!

## Mayo Clinic Provides *Ten Tips* for Dealing with Gastroesophageal Reflux

Many of us experience an occasional bout of heartburn, especially after eating large meals or spicy food. Occasional heartburn is annoying, but is rarely cause for concern. However, when heartburn is frequent, (two or more times a week) it can be a serious problem.

Heartburn is the most common symptom of gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), a disease in which stomach acid and/or bile flows back (refluxes) into your food pipe (esophagus). This constant backwash of acid can irritate the lining of your esophagus. Further, when left untreated, GERD can lead to Barrett's Esophagus, which is a precancerous condition that can result in esophageal adenocarcinoma, the fastest rising cancer in the United States.

**Following are several ideas on how to avoid and manage heartburn, including tips on what to do if you suffer from frequent heartburn.**

1. **Control your weight.** — Excess pounds put pressure on your abdomen, pushing on your stomach and causing acid to back up into your esophagus.
2. **Eat smaller meals.** — This reduces pressure on the lower esophageal sphincter and helps prevent acid from washing back into your esophagus.
3. **Loosen your belt.** — Clothes that fit tightly around your waist put pressure on your abdomen and the lower esophageal sphincter.
4. **Eliminate heartburn triggers.** — Common triggers include fatty or fried foods, alcohol, chocolate, peppermint, garlic, onion, caffeine and nicotine.
5. **Avoid stooping or bending.** — Bending over for a long period of time, especially shortly after eating, can increase reflux and heartburn.
6. **Eat a few hours before bedtime.** — Wait at least three to four hours after eating before going to bed, and don't lie down right after eating. Mild physical activity after dinner such as walking helps your stomach empty faster and may prevent reflux, especially at night.
7. **Raise the head of your bed.** — An elevation of about four to six inches puts gravity to work for you. Place wooden or concrete blocks securely under the feet at the head of your bed; alternately sleep in an adjustable bed.
8. **Don't smoke.** — Smoking may increase stomach acid. The swallowing of air during smoking may also aggravate belching and acid reflux.
9. **Try to get temporary relief.** — A variety of effective medications for reflux are available without prescription, which in increasing effectiveness include antacids, H2 blockers (e.g. ranitidine) and proton pump inhibitors (e.g. omeprazole). Use only as directed on the package.
10. **See your doctor.** — If heartburn occurs two or more times a week, is persistent or severe, see your doctor. You may need to have medical tests, and/or stronger prescription medications for GERD.

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