

HEALTH REALLY MATTERS

# Heartburn: It Doesn't Feel Like Love

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## Quick Facts about Heartburn

- Is also called dyspepsia or GERD (gastroesophageal reflux disease).
- Stomach acid backing up into the esophagus can cause a burning sensation.
- 5 million Canadians experience heartburn at least once a week.
- See your doctor if symptoms that continue for more than 2 weeks.
- Can be caused by a bacteria *Helicobacter pylori* that can be effectively treated.

## Signs of Dyspepsia

- Upper stomach pain.
- Feeling full after meals.
- Feeling full more quickly than normal.
- Bloating or gas.
- Nausea.

## Signs of GERD

- Frequent acid regurgitation (heartburn).
- Burning feeling in stomach.
- Nausea.
- Dysphagia (difficulty swallowing).
- Pain when swallowing.

See your doctor right away if you have any of these alarm symptoms:

- Vomiting that continues longer than 48 hours.
- Bleeding, either when you throw up or if you notice blood in your bowel movements (black, tarry or bloody stools).
- Lumps or a mass in the stomach area.
- Chest pain that runs down your arm or up your neck. Many people having a heart attack think it is just heartburn.
- Weight loss without trying to lose weight.

## Causes of heartburn

- Peptic ulcer disease.
- Reflux esophagitis.
- Gastric or esophageal cancer.
- Conditions such as: hiatal hernia, celiac disease, crohn's disease or pancreatitis.
- Food intolerances: dairy (lactose intolerance).



**MEDICINE CENTRE**  
PHARMACY

- Some medications: antibiotics, anti-inflammatory, iron or potassium supplements.
- Herbal medicines: garlic, feverfew, white willow.

## You can help to manage your heartburn with these healthy habits

- Manage your weight: if you are overweight, losing even 10 lbs can improve your symptoms.
- Quit smoking.
- Avoid foods that cause symptoms: fatty foods, chocolate, coffee, alcohol or spicy foods.
- Don't lie down after eating.
- Eat smaller more frequent meals.
- Work on managing stress in your life.
- Elevate head of bed with a wedge by about 10 – 20 cm.

## Heartburn treatments

- Antacids—Tums, Maalox, Gaviscon, Rolaids:
  - Work quickly but need to be taken often.
  - May interact with some medications.
  - Can be taken before or after meals.
  - Probably not helpful for very bad symptoms.
- H<sub>2</sub>Receptor Antagonists—Ranitidine (Zantac), Famotidine (Pepcid):
  - Take a bit longer to work but also last longer (good for nighttime symptoms).
  - Reduce the amount of acid produced.
  - Relieve symptoms in 50% of patients.

- Proton Pump inhibitors—Omeprazole (Olex) and other prescription products:
  - Most effective acid reducer but takes longer to work.
  - Allow for healing of the esophagus or any ulcers.
  - More expensive than other treatments.
  - Relieve symptoms in 80% of patients.

## Your Pharmacist can

- Discuss benefits and possible side effects of the different medications and help you to get the most out of them.
- Make sure the treatment you decide to try does not interact with any of your medications or medical conditions.
- Suggest when it would be best to visit the doctor.
- Support you with lifestyle changes to help manage your symptoms.
- Suggest ways to make it easier to take your medications regularly.

## Find more great information and tools here

- HealthLink BC: <http://goo.gl/TqsLO3>
- Check your symptoms: <http://goo.gl/9w05XO>
- Canadian Digestive Health Foundation: <http://goo.gl/X4t78Z>
- GI Society—Canadian Society of Intestinal Research: <http://goo.gl/4px1Sy>

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