

Indigestion

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Indigestion, also known as upset stomach or dyspepsia, is discomfort or a burning feeling in the upper abdomen, often accompanied by nausea, abdominal bloating, belching, and sometimes vomiting. Some people also use the term indigestion to describe the symptom of heartburn.

Indigestion might be caused by a disease in the digestive tract such as ulcer or gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), but for many people, it results from eating too much, eating too quickly, eating high-fat foods, or eating during stressful situations. Smoking, drinking too much alcohol, using medications that irritate the stomach lining, being tired, and having ongoing stress can also cause indigestion or make it worse.

Some people have persistent indigestion that is not related to any of these factors. This type of indigestion—called functional or nonulcer dyspepsia—may be caused by a problem in the muscular squeezing action of the stomach (motility).

To diagnose indigestion, the doctor might perform tests for problems, like ulcers. In the process of diagnosis, a person may have x rays of the stomach and small intestine or undergo endoscopy, in which the doctor uses an instrument to look at the inside of the stomach.

Avoiding the foods and situations that seem to cause indigestion in some cases is the most successful way to treat it. Heartburn caused by acid reflux is usually improved by treatment with antacids, H₂ blockers, or proton pump inhibitors. Smokers can help relieve their indigestion by quitting smoking, or at least not smoking right before eating. Exercising with a full stomach may cause indigestion, so scheduling exercise before a meal or at least an hour afterward might help.

To treat indigestion caused by a functional problem in the digestive tract, the doctor may prescribe medicine that affects stomach motility.

Because indigestion can be a sign of, or mimic, a more serious disease, people should see a doctor if they have:

- vomiting, weight loss, or appetite loss
- black tarry stools or blood in vomit
- severe pain in the upper right abdomen
- discomfort unrelated to eating

- indigestion accompanied by shortness of breath, sweating, or pain radiating to the jaw, neck, or arm
- symptoms that persist for more than 2 weeks

For More Information

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The National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse collects resource information on digestive diseases for the Combined Health Information Database (CHID). CHID is a database produced by health-related agencies of the Federal Government. This database provides titles, abstracts, and availability information for health information and health education resources.

To provide you with the most up-to-date resources, information specialists at the clearinghouse created an automatic search of CHID. To obtain this information, you may view the results of the automatic search on Indigestion.

If you wish to perform your own search of the database, you may access the CHID Online website and search CHID yourself.

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The National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse (NDDIC) is a service of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK). The NIDDK is part of the National Institutes of Health under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Established in 1980, the clearinghouse provides information about digestive diseases to people with digestive disorders and to their families, health care professionals, and the public. NDDIC answers inquiries, develops and distributes publications, and works closely with professional and patient organizations and Government agencies to coordinate resources about digestive diseases.

Publications produced by the clearinghouse are carefully reviewed by both NIDDK scientists and outside experts.

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