

Heartburn and indigestion

Heartburn is a burning sensation behind the breastbone. It can be very painful. It is caused when acid from the stomach irritates the lining of the gullet (oesophagus).

Indigestion is discomfort in the upper part of the tummy (abdomen), happening especially after meals. It can happen when stomach acid irritates the lining of the stomach or small bowel. Some drugs (such as steroids or anti-inflammatory painkillers) and some cancer treatments (such as chemotherapy) can also irritate the stomach lining. You may get indigestion if you have a small stomach capacity, do not eat or drink much, or if you do not move around very much.

Tips for managing heartburn and indigestion

- Talk to your doctor. They can try to find out the cause and prescribe medicines to help reduce or relieve it for you.
- There are medicines that can help relieve irritation by neutralizing the acid. Your GP or cancer specialist can suggest what might be best for you to try.
- Make a note of any foods that cause discomfort so you can avoid them.
- Large meals, chocolate, alcohol, fatty and spicy foods, fizzy drinks, chewing gum, hard-boiled sweets, mint, aniseed and dill are all known to cause problems. You may want to limit or avoid these.
- When symptoms have settled, you can try reintroducing what you have been avoiding in small quantities, one at a time. This is so you can start to have a healthy balanced diet.
- Wear loose clothing around your waist.
- Limit activity for at least 45 to 60 minutes after eating.
- Try not to lie flat on your back, especially after meals.
- If you get a lot of indigestion at night, avoid eating, or drinking tea or coffee, for three to four hours before you go to bed. Sleep in a semi-upright position, propped up on pillows. If you need a drink, have water.
- Try to get to and maintain a healthy weight.
- If you smoke, try to stop or cut down. The chemicals in cigarette smoke may make indigestion worse.

Local resources:

Resource	Contact details

National resources:

Resource	Contact details
Oesophageal Patients' Association	www.opa.org.uk
British Dietetic Association (BDA)	www.bda.uk.com
CORE	www.corecharity.org.uk

Further information

- **MAC13613 Eating problems and cancer**
- **MAC13614 The building-up diet**
- **MAC13612 Healthy eating and cancer**
- **www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/coping/side-effects-and-symptoms/eating-problems**

More information and support

More than one in three of us will get cancer. For most of us it will be the toughest fight we ever face. And the feelings of isolation and loneliness that so many people experience make it even harder. But you don't have to go through it alone. The Macmillan team is with you every step of the way.

Visit macmillan.org.uk or call us on **0808 808 00 00**, Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm.

Hard of hearing? Use textphone **0808 808 0121**, or Text Relay. Speak another language? We have telephone interpreters. We provide information in a range of languages and formats. Visit macmillan.org.uk/otherformats or call us.