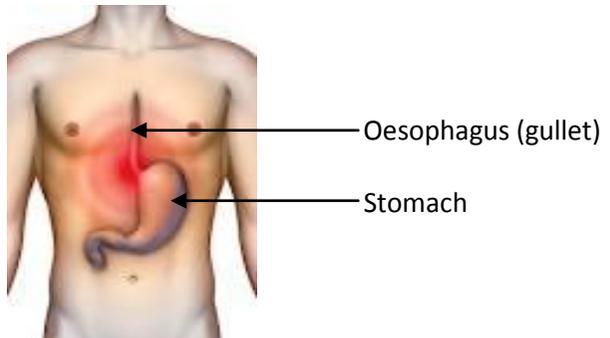


Self-care information on...

Indigestion



What is indigestion?

Indigestion (also known as dyspepsia) is a term which describes pain or discomfort in your chest or stomach.

What causes indigestion?

It is caused by stomach acid coming into contact with the sensitive, protective lining of the digestive system. The stomach acid breaks down the lining, leading to soreness and swelling.

In most cases, there is no underlying medical reason for indigestion. It is usually caused by a process known as acid reflux, where acid from your stomach escapes and is forced back up into your oesophagus (gullet).

It is often related to eating, although it can be caused by other factors such as smoking, drinking alcohol or taking certain medications.

What are the symptoms of indigestion?

The symptoms of indigestion are often described as 'heartburn', which you may experience as a burning pain behind your breastbone. Heartburn (also known as acid reflux) is caused by acid that passes from your stomach into your oesophagus.

If you have indigestion, you may also have symptoms such as:

- Feeling uncomfortably full or heavy
- Belching
- Bringing food back up from your stomach
- Bloating
- Nausea (feeling sick)
- Vomiting

How do you treat indigestion?

If you have indigestion only occasionally with mild pain and discomfort, you may not need to visit your GP practice.

Diet and lifestyle changes

It may be possible to ease your symptoms by making a few simple changes to your diet and lifestyle:

- **Healthy weight:** If you are overweight or obese, then losing weight through regular exercise and by eating a healthy, balanced diet may help. Being overweight puts more pressure on your stomach, making it easier for stomach acid to be pushed back up into your oesophagus. Contact Live Well Suffolk for advice on weight loss.
- **Stop smoking:** If you smoke, the chemicals you inhale in cigarette smoke may contribute to your indigestion. For help with stopping smoking call the NHS Smoking Helpline on 0800 022 4332 or contact Live Well Suffolk.
- **Diet and alcohol:** Make a note of any particular food or drink that seems to make your indigestion worse and avoid these if possible. This may mean eating less rich, spicy and fatty foods; cutting down on drinks that contain caffeine, such as tea, coffee and cola and avoiding or cutting down on alcohol.
- **Bedtime:** If you tend to experience indigestion symptoms at night, avoid eating for three to four hours before you go to bed.

Medicines that provide immediate indigestion relief

- **Antacids**

Antacids are a type of medicine that can provide immediate relief for mild to moderate symptoms of indigestion. They work by neutralising the acid in your stomach (making it less acidic), so that it no longer irritates the lining of your digestive system. The effect of an antacid only lasts for a few hours at a time, so you may need to take more than one dose. Always follow the instructions on the packet to ensure you do not take too much.

Antacids are available as chewable tablets and liquid form. You can buy them from pharmacies and supermarkets. Examples include Rennie[®] and Tums[®].

- **Alginates**

Some antacids also contain a medicine called an alginate. This helps relieve indigestion caused by acid reflux. Alginates form a foam barrier that floats on the surface of your stomach contents, keeping stomach acid in your stomach and away from your oesophagus. You can buy these from pharmacies and supermarkets. Examples include Peptac[®] liquid.

Other indigestion treatments

Other indigestion medicines work by reducing the amount of acid your stomach produces. Some of these medicines are available to buy without a prescription:

	Who can buy it?	Where is it sold?
Omeprazole 10mg tablets	Adults over 18 years old	Pharmacies only
Pantoprazole 20mg tablets	Adults over 18 years old	Pharmacies only
Ranitidine 75mg tablets	Adults and adolescents over 16 years of age.	Supermarkets, shops and pharmacies

When bought without a prescription, these medicines should only be used short-term. Ask your pharmacist for advice if you think this type of medicine may be helpful for you.

If your indigestion is persistent, you should visit your GP practice.

When to contact your GP practice

For most people, indigestion is mild and infrequent and does not require treatment from a healthcare professional. However, it is important to visit your GP practice if you have recurring indigestion and you:

- Are 55 years old or over
- Have lost a lot of weight without meaning to
- Have increasing difficulty swallowing
- Have persistent vomiting
- Have persistent tiredness
- Have a lump in your stomach
- Have blood in your vomit or blood in your stools
- Have tried treating the indigestion yourself and it has not worked.

If you need any further information:

- Ask your pharmacist
- NHS choices: www.nhs.uk
- Patient UK www.patient.co.uk
- Live Well Suffolk <http://www.livewellsuffolk.org.uk/>
Adelphi House, Turret lane, Ipswich, IP4 1DL
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