HEARTBURN AND YOUR HEALTH

What is Heartburn?
A painful burning sensation in your chest or throat, usually just behind your breastbone

Causes
• Stomach acid backing up into your esophagus
• Trigger foods and beverages
• Some medications
• Pregnancy
• Excess body weight
• Eating then lying on your back

Symptoms
• Burning sensation in the chest after eating
• Burning or “off” taste in the throat
• Feeling that food is “sticking” in the middle of the chest or throat

When to see your doctor
• Immediately, if you experience severe chest pain
  Especially when combined with difficulty breathing, pain spread to shoulders, jaw, neck, or back, a cold sweat, and/or light headedness – other signs and symptoms of a heart attack
• If heartburn occurs more than twice a week
• If symptoms persist despite use of over-the-counter medications
• If you have difficulty swallowing or pain when swallowing
• If you experience nausea, vomiting, or extreme stomach pain

Prevention
• Eat slowly
• Wear loose-fitting clothes
• Avoid triggers foods/drinks
• Stop smoking
• Limit or avoid alcohol
• Try to avoid overeating
• If overweight, try to lose weight
• Try to avoid going to bed with a full stomach

Trigger Foods and Drinks
Alcohol
Chocolate
Fried foods
Spicy foods
Condiments
Peppermint
Coffee and tea
Carbonated drinks
Citrus fruits and products
Black pepper, garlic, onions
Tomatoes and tomato products

If your heartburn is worse when lying down:
• Raise the head of your bed
• Eat earlier

If your heartburn worsens after exercise:
• Time your meals
• Drink more water
Complications
If you have heartburn more than twice a week, then you may have gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD). GERD treatment may require prescription medications and occasionally other procedures. GERD also can lead to additional complications (i.e., esophagitis, Barrett’s disease, esophagus strictures, or esophageal cancer).

Medical Intervention

**Diagnosis** – Endoscopy, X-ray, and/or 24-hour esophageal pH probe study

**Treatments**
- Antacids to neutralize stomach acid  
  *For example* – Rolaids, Tums, Maalox
- Medications to reduce acid production  
  *For example* – Zantac, Prilosec
- Surgery to repair the lower esophageal sphincter

**Lifestyle Changes & Alternative Medicine**
The lifestyle changes for treatment are the same as those for prevention – maintain a healthy weight, avoid tight fitting clothing, avoid foods and drinks that cause heartburn, eat smaller meals, delay lying down after a meal, elevate the head of your bed, and stop smoking.

In addition, anxiety and stress can worsen heartburn symptoms. Some complementary and alternative treatments, such as aromatherapy, exercise, hypnosis, listening to music, and massage, may help you cope with anxiety and stress and lessen symptoms of heartburn.