

# Health Education

## Heartburn

### What is heartburn?

Heartburn is a burning sensation in the throat or chest that is caused by the upward movement of acid from the stomach into the esophagus. It occurs when the lower esophageal sphincter (LES), a muscular opening between the stomach and the esophagus, opens after a meal.

### What are the signs and symptoms?

You may experience a burning sensation in your throat or chest, a chronic cough, a bitter or sour taste in your mouth or belching. The symptoms may be worse after eating. Bending over or lying down may aggravate the symptoms.

### What is the treatment for heartburn?

Treatment varies from changing your diet to prescription medication. Some foods may weaken the LES and cause heartburn. Avoiding some of the following foods may decrease your symptoms: chocolate, peppermint, fried or fatty foods, citrus juices, tomato products, coffee and alcoholic beverages. Antacids, such as Mylanta, may neutralize the gastric acid and decrease the discomfort. Prescription medications are available and should be taken as instructed by your clinician.

### How long will it take to heal?

You should have some reduction in symptoms relatively soon, if not immediately, after initiating the recommended treatment. Symptoms should resolve within 1 -2 weeks.

Some other helpful hints:

- Avoid late night snacking, especially fatty or spicy foods.
- Elevate the head of your bed six inches.
- Avoid lying down for 2 -3 hours after eating.
- Schedule an appointment with the nutritionist to discuss ways to lose weight if you are overweight.
- Smoking weakens the LES.

### When should I make an appointment with my clinician?

You should call and schedule an appointment if you develop:

- Vomiting
- Fever
- Abdominal pain
- Pain that does not go away after taking antacids for 1 - 2 weeks
- Unexplained weight loss.