

Frequent heartburn may signal more serious digestive problem

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Could be gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), and treatments can help, expert says.

(HealthDay)—Every Thanksgiving, lots of people loosen their belts and reach for antacids to quell an overstuffed tummy.

But for some, turkey day is just another day of severe or persistent heartburn, and that chronic digestive trouble may be a sign of a condition called [gastroesophageal reflux disease](#) (GERD), an expert says.

In GERD, the contents of the stomach repeatedly flow back into the esophagus. This causes symptoms such as [chronic heartburn](#), regurgitation, difficulty swallowing, sore throat and morning hoarseness, explained Nancy Norton, president and founder of the International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders.

"The symptoms of GERD can seem so common that many people do not consult with [health care providers](#) or mention them during routine exams," Norton said in a foundation news release.

"When symptoms often occur two or more times a week, or become more severe, it is important to talk to a physician. Left untreated, GERD can lead to complications, or other health problems," she added.

If you think you may have GERD, see your doctor, Norton advised.

Before your appointment, she said, makes notes about: when your heartburn occurs, how often, and its severity; any other symptoms; how your symptoms affect your daily activities and sleep; diet and lifestyle changes you've made in an attempt to relieve your symptoms and how effective those changes were; and any antacids or other over-the-counter medications you've used and how effective they were.

"Providing symptom-related details can help a physician identify key elements that characterize GERD," Norton said.

She said getting an accurate diagnosis is the first step in creating a personalized treatment plan. And, treatment can help improve [symptoms](#), make you feel better and help you avoid future complications, she explained.

Nov. 22 to 28 is GERD Awareness Week.

More information: The U.S. National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases outlines [GERD treatment options](#).

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