

Is it heartburn or something else?

April 4 2019, by Len Canter, Healthday Reporter



(HealthDay)—With so many heartburn medications available over the counter, it might be surprising to learn that heartburn itself isn't a health condition, but rather a symptom of something else.

First, be sure to distinguish it from indigestion, which is primarily an uncomfortable fullness after eating. With heartburn, there's a burning sensation in your chest or neck. It might feel like food is coming back up into your mouth, maybe with a bad taste.

Fatty, fried and spicy dishes, [citrus fruits](#), [caffeinated drinks](#), garlic, onions and tomatoes are some foods that can bring on heartburn. So can habits like smoking and drinking alcohol.

Other Heartburn Triggers

- Being overweight
- Eating large meals
- Lying down soon after eating

Making lifestyle changes to avoid these triggers may help reduce heartburn symptoms or their frequency.

If you still have heartburn on a regular basis, see your doctor. You could have GERD, which is gastro-esophageal reflux disease. That's when stomach acids and food back up into your esophagus, the tube that links your mouth and stomach. It often happens because the muscle that seals off your stomach is weak.

Getting the right diagnosis is especially important if you have [persistent symptoms](#) like a [sore throat](#), cough or scratchy voice, difficulty or pain when swallowing, frequent burping or vomiting. Don't self-treat with over-the-counter [heartburn medications](#). They're not effective for everyone and some have serious long-term side effects. And they can't treat any underlying problem.

Also know that chest pain called angina and even a heart attack can feel

like heartburn. If you have persistent pain and you aren't sure if it's just heartburn, call 911.

More information: The American Gastroenterological Association has more on [GERD](#) and how to recognize it.

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Citation: Is it heartburn or something else? (2019, April 4) retrieved 5 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-04-heartburn.html>

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