



# The Oregon Clinic - Gastroenterology

## Indigestion

### **What is indigestion?**

Indigestion, also known as upset stomach or dyspepsia, is discomfort or a burning feeling in the upper abdomen, often accompanied by nausea, abdominal bloating, belching, and sometimes vomiting. Some people also use the term indigestion to describe the symptom of heartburn.

### **How is indigestion caused?**

Indigestion might be caused by a disease in the digestive tract such as ulcer or gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), but for many people, it results from eating too much, eating too quickly, eating high-fat foods, or eating during stressful situations. Smoking, drinking too much alcohol, using medications that irritate the stomach lining, being tired, and having ongoing stress can also cause indigestion or make it worse.

Some people have persistent indigestion that is not related to any of these factors. This type of indigestion—called functional or nonulcer dyspepsia—may be caused by a problem in the muscular squeezing action of the stomach (motility).

### **How is indigestion diagnosed?**

To diagnose indigestion, the doctor might perform tests for problems, like ulcers. In the process of diagnosis, a person may have x rays of the stomach and small intestine or undergo endoscopy, in which the doctor uses an instrument to look at the inside of the stomach.

### **How is indigestion treated?**

Avoiding the foods and situations that seem to cause indigestion in some cases is the most successful way to treat it. Heartburn caused by acid reflux is usually improved by treatment with antacids, H<sub>2</sub>-blockers, or proton pump inhibitors. Smokers can help relieve their indigestion by quitting smoking, or at least not smoking right before eating. Exercising with a full stomach may cause indigestion, so scheduling exercise before a meal or at least an hour afterward might help.

To treat indigestion caused by a functional problem in the digestive tract, the doctor may prescribe medicine that affects stomach motility.

Because indigestion can be a sign of, or mimic, a more serious disease, people should see a doctor if they have:

- vomiting, weight loss, or appetite loss
- black tarry stools or blood in vomit
- severe pain in the upper right abdomen
- discomfort unrelated to eating
- indigestion accompanied by shortness of breath, sweating, or pain radiating to the jaw, neck, or arm
- symptoms that persist for more than 2 weeks