

# INDIGESTION

## TO YOUR HEALTH - PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

### DESCRIPTION

Indigestion is the term used to describe chest or abdominal discomfort following meals. The medical term is dyspepsia. Almost everyone will experience indigestion at one time or another. Some people have it every day, others may have it occasionally.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Mild nausea
- Upset stomach
- Upper abdominal discomfort
- Gas or belching
- Bloating or full feeling
- Stomach may feel full soon after starting a meal
- Acid taste in mouth

### CAUSES

- Excess stomach acid
- Problems with motility
- A possible bacterial infection

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Eating too much and eating too quickly
- Eating food with a high fat content
- Poor digestion of gas-forming foods such as beans, cucumbers, cabbage, turnips, and onions
- Smoking
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Lactose intolerance
- Stress or anxiety
- Some drugs can irritate the stomach lining. These include nonsteroidal anti-inflammatories (such as aspirin or ibuprofen), iron supplements, antibiotics, and others.
- Swallowing too much air when chewing
- Exercising right after eating
- Food allergy
- Pregnancy
- Overweight

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Most people will self-treat this disorder. If symptoms persist or cause concern, see your health care provider. A physical exam may be

## Student Health Center

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This information is for educational purposes only. Consult your doctor for specific medical advice, diagnosis and treatment.

done and questions asked about your symptoms. Medical tests may sometimes be needed to check for other disorders.

Treatment and prevention are similar. Follow the steps listed here to help relieve the symptoms.

- Eat slowly. Chew food carefully and completely.
- Don't smoke right before or during a meal.
- Relax after meals, but don't lie down.
- Avoid excitement or exercise right after a meal.
- Avoid situations that make you swallow air, such as chewing gum, or drinking carbonated drinks.
- Avoid tight clothing.
- Avoid foods you don't digest well.
- Avoid emotional problems during meals.
- Place blocks under the head of your bed to raise it a few inches.
- Avoid nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. Ask your health care provider about the other options.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Symptoms can be controlled with treatment, but recurrence is common.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Usually none expected. Frequent indigestion over an extended period of time may indicate other disorders such as atherosclerotic heart disease, hypertension, or renal disease.

### MEDICATION

- You may use nonprescription antacids to neutralize the stomach acid or other nonprescription medications that reduce stomach acid.
- Stronger drugs may be prescribed if needed.

### ACTIVITY

No limits. Daily exercise (such as a 30 minute walk) helps promote good health. Don't exercise right after a meal.

### DIET

Eat small meals. Don't eat near bedtime. Avoid foods that cause discomfort. Eat slowly; don't gulp food. Avoid alcohol or caffeine on an empty stomach. Lose weight, if you are overweight.

### NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF...

- Other symptoms occur along with indigestion, such as chest pain, shortness of breath, or rapid weight loss.



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Dial-A-Nurse is available after-hours until 10:30 p.m. during fall and spring semesters. In case of emergency dial 911.