Is it really just Heartburn?

Diet tips to avoid heartburn and indigestion
Quick Quiz

Q1. Can drinking cabbage juice help indigestion?  Yes ☑  No ☐

Q2. Does peppermint help?  Yes ☑  No ☐

Q3. Is it true eating pastry products has no effect on heartburn or indigestion?  Yes ☑  No ☐

Q4. Does eating acidic food exacerbate my heartburn or indigestion?  Yes ☑  No ☐

Q5. Could drinking ginger tea help with indigestion?  Yes ☑  No ☐

Q6. Does apple cider vinegar help with heartburn or indigestion?  Yes ☑  No ☐

Answers

Q1. Yes. Cabbage juice contains a compound that aids the digestive function of the gut, so could benefit indigestion (although you might want to mix it with apple or another vegetable juice because of its strong taste – 1 part cabbage to 3 parts other juice).

Q2. No, except for chewing gum. Do not take peppermint, peppermint capsules or drink peppermint tea if you have heartburn or a hiatus hernia. Peppermint can relax the sphincter between the stomach and oesophagus, which could allow stomach acids to flow back into the oesophagus. (The sphincter is the muscle that separates the oesophagus from the stomach.) By relaxing the sphincter, peppermint may actually make the symptoms of heartburn and indigestion worse. If your experience is that peppermint tea works on your reflux symptoms, then continue rather than avoid. On the other hand there is some evidence that chewing gum (including peppermint flavor gum) can be helpful.
What is it with this heartburn when I bend over and/or exert myself? I’m young, fit and take care of myself. Can’t be anything serious can it? I’ll just take more medicine!”
**Q3.** No. High-fat foods tend to stay in the stomach longer, and therefore boost your risk of reflux symptoms. Preparing your favourite foods in a different way could make a difference to your heartburn symptoms and your overall health. Trim extra fat off meat and poultry and cut the skin off chicken. Instead of frying, try to bake, broil, grill, or roast (in a little oil, remember you’re roasting not frying!).

**Q4.** Yes. While fruits and vegetables are generally an excellent and necessary part of your diet, certain types have been shown to exacerbate symptoms. Common offenders include citrus fruits, onion and garlic. A study of raw onions was shown to significantly increase the number of reflux and heartburn episodes in people who suffer regularly from heartburn. However, raw onions did not increase these measures in non-heartburn sufferers. Some doctors suggest that cooked onions may be easier for sufferers to tolerate. Having water with meals instead of fruit juice, tea or fizzy drinks would also help dilute stomach acid, making heartburn less likely.

**Q5.** Yes. Fresh ginger acts as an anti-inflammatory. A **small** daily dose of no more than 4 grams can be helpful; however a larger dose can actually cause heartburn. If you would like to see if it works for you, you could try steeping ginger in hot water to make a tea or chewing a piece of ginger, or using ginger (no more than 4 grams) when cooking.

**Q6.** Probably not. The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) which regulates the health claims manufacturers can make about their products hasn’t approved any health claims for apple cider vinegar. Most claims made about apple cider vinegar have no solid evidence to back them up and medical research into its properties have had mixed results. If you would like to see if it works for you, the dose is 2 tablespoons of good quality apple cider vinegar in cool water.

If you a friend or family member experience any of the symptoms described in this leaflet – seek medical advice from a doctor. If you are not experiencing any of these symptoms but someone you know is, please pass this leaflet to them.
“Can’t tell him I have had heartburn most of my adult life - it would only be another burden and worry - what difference would it make now - I don’t want to make a fuss”
What is heartburn (reflux)?

Heartburn, also called acid reflux or indigestion is one of the symptoms of Gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD). It is characterised by a sharp, burning pain just below the breast bone or between the shoulder blades. This pain is caused by the reflux of the stomach contents back into the oesophagus (food pipe) some of which may reach the mouth or be sensed in the back of the throat. Heartburn can lead to oesophagitis and sometimes to Barrett’s oesophagus.

What is oesophagitis?

Oesophagitis is an inflammation of the lining of the oesophagus. In most people this is caused by the digestive juices in the stomach repeatedly moving upwards into the lower oesophagus (causing reflux).

Sufferers may experience a burning sensation in the lower chest immediately after swallowing hot fluids (e.g. tea or soup), alcohol, concentrated fruit juice or hot fatty foods such as bacon and eggs. A similar discomfort may be felt after meals, on bending or lying flat. Food or fluid may come up into the mouth (regurgitation) especially when lying down or in bed at night. In severe cases the person may wake up coughing or with a choking sensation. A person with oesophagitis may experience difficulty swallowing, first solid foods and then more liquid foods, with the solid food feeling as though it is stuck.

Most importantly, always remember never to suffer in silence. If you are constantly having to take over the counter medication for your stomach, such as Gaviscon or Rennies you should make an appointment to see your GP. You may need to be referred for an endoscopy.

What exactly is Barrett’s?

Barrett’s is a change in the cells lining the oesophagus and is diagnosed by taking small tissue samples (biopsies) from the oesophagus. When these biopsies are examined under the microscope the cells lining the lower end of the oesophagus, which are normally layered like the skin for protection, have changed to look like those of the stomach or intestine which are more used to handling acid and bile.
Keeping Healthy - Knowing the right information

There are foods and substances that make reflux more likely. Avoiding or reducing the following may therefore reduce symptoms:

- Chocolate
- Fatty foods such as pastry or fried foods
- Excess of Alcohol
- Caffeine
- Smoking

Large meals are more likely to cause the muscle joining the oesophagus to the stomach (called the Lower Oesophageal Sphincter) to open and therefore small and regular meals are likely to reduce symptoms. If possible, it will help if you do not eat during the last three hours before bedtime, and do not drink within the last two hours before bedtime.

There are also other things that can make symptoms of GORD worse. These vary from person to person but common food and drinks that trigger symptoms include:

- Spicy foods
- Tomatoes and tomato based foods
- Acidic foods such as citrus fruits or onions/garlic
- Wine (Red wine has protective effects for oesophageal cancer).
- Spirits (particularly without mixers)
- Peppermint
- Fizzy drinks

Everyone is different and there may be other things that trigger your symptoms. Keeping a diary of symptoms as well as food and drinks taken can help to identify triggers which may then be avoided.
Life Style & Food and Drink

If you suffer from indigestion, heartburn or oesophagitis, these handy tips may help you:

- Try not to lie down too soon after eating
- Eat small, regular meals
- Adopt a sensible lifestyle
- Take moderate, regular exercise
- Control the amount of alcohol you drink
- Lose weight if you are overweight
- Relax and try to minimize stress

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A Note of Caution

- Do not start lots of excessive exercise without consulting with your doctor.
- Try not to wear tight, constricting clothes around your waist.
- Try not to eat large or fatty meals (or any that aggravate your symptoms).

References and Further Reading

http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/gastroesophageal-reflux-disease/Pages/Introduction.aspx

http://www.patient.co.uk/health/acid-reflux-and-oesophagitis

www.heartburncanceruk.org
HCUK website has lots of information and they are happy to welcome new members from all over the UK. Visit their website and find out more.

The content of this booklet is for guidance only and should not be a replacement for seeking medical advice from a qualified doctor.

Thank you to the Medical Trustees, Lay Members, Dieticians, Nurses and Patients who have helped with the content of this booklet.
“this heartburn hurts, doctor says it’s the beer and not to worry. I did tell the doctor that my father died from oesophageal cancer, but he says I’m too young to have anything serious just take another tablet”
Help us by donating now!

HCUK relies on public support to do their vital work.

Donating to HCUK is easy.

You can donate:

- on-line through justgiving.com and virgin money,
- by cheque made payable to: Heartburn Cancer UK
- through a payroll giving scheme,
- with regular standing orders,
- as part of your legacy,
- or every time you shop online.

If you are a current UK taxpayer we would encourage you to complete a gift aid declaration which allows us to reclaim the tax so a donation of £10 is worth £12.50 to us.

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