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## Indigestion

Indigestion causes discomfort and pain in the area between your ribs and belly button and usually occurs during or after eating. You may feel sick, bloated or require less food to feel full. A common symptom of indigestion is heartburn, where the acid from the stomach refluxes back into the oesophagus, causing irritation.

Reflux can be caused by foods including cabbage, onions, cucumber, curries or drinks such as wine, fizzy drinks, coffee and tea. The way we eat can also affect indigestion such as eating fast, rich or large meals. Stress, smoking, pregnancy and certain medicines may be contributing factors. Try and identify the cause of your heartburn and avoid these things. Common medicines that may cause indigestion include aspirin and anti-inflammatory medicines. Try taking these with food and lots of water, while sitting or standing upright.

There are a wide range of medicines available for the relief of heartburn or indigestion. A new development in this area is the availability of Losec without a prescription, under certain circumstances. Losec is well known and extensively used to reduce the amount of acid produced in the gut so can be used for reflux-type symptoms in people over 18 years. Losec has been reformulated into 10mg modified release tablets, taken two daily until relief is obtained and then one tablet daily thereafter, for up to 14 days at a time. Ask your Pharmacist for more information and if it is suitable for you.

Other remedies available include antacids (Mylanta) which neutralize excess acid in the stomach to provide quick, effective relief from the bloated feelings and burning pain. Heartburn symptoms often are relieved by alginates (Gaviscon) that form a raft on top of your stomach contents, helping to prevent them being regurgitated. H2 antagonists (Zantac) are available to reduce the amount of acid produced in your stomach. It is important that you tell your pharmacist or doctor if remedies have been ineffective or symptoms continue so we can investigate further if necessary.

There are a number of lifestyle changes you can make to prevent indigestion and heartburn. They include stopping smoking, increasing physical activity to 20 minutes a day and relaxing effectively. Avoid rich, spicy and fatty foods. Rather, eat smaller, high fibre meals often and not close to bedtime. Refined or processed foods are hard for the body to digest so are best avoided. Try to relax at meal times, sit upright and eat slowly, thoroughly chewing your food. Certain foods don't combine well when eaten at the same time. You can help by eating any fruit first or by leaving an hour after a meal before you have a piece of fruit.

It may also help to prevent indigestion by eating foods containing digestive enzymes such as bromelain (from pineapples) and papain (from papayas). A probiotic may be beneficial because a lack of healthy bacteria can trigger an attack. Alternatively, taking 2 teaspoons of apple cider vinegar ten minutes before a meal may aid digestion by breaking down the protein from food for easier absorption.