

## Heartburn and Indigestion During Pregnancy: What You Need to Know



### Highlights

Indigestion (dyspepsia) is discomfort or pain in your stomach.

Heartburn is a burning pain in your stomach and chest caused by stomach acid.

Heartburn is common during pregnancy due to hormonal changes and the pressure of the uterus on the stomach.

Certain foods and drinks, like fatty foods, spicy foods, chocolate, citrus juices, caffeine, and alcohol, can trigger heartburn.

Eating smaller meals more often, not lying down after meals, and sleeping with elevated pillows may help reduce heartburn.

There are medicines available to help control indigestion and heartburn.

Consult your doctor if symptoms persist.

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## **Understanding Indigestion and Heartburn**

Indigestion, or dyspepsia, refers to a feeling of discomfort or pain in the stomach, often occurring after eating or drinking. Heartburn, on the other hand, is a burning sensation in the stomach or chest that rises toward the throat. This occurs when stomach acid flows back up into the esophagus, causing irritation. In pregnancy, heartburn is very common, affecting up to 80% of pregnant individuals at some point. Both indigestion and heartburn can be uncomfortable and may interfere with daily activities, especially during the later stages of pregnancy.

## **Why Heartburn Happens in Pregnancy**

During pregnancy, several factors can contribute to heartburn. One primary cause is hormonal changes, particularly the hormone progesterone, which can relax the muscle at the junction of the stomach and esophagus. This allows stomach acid to flow back into the esophagus, causing heartburn. As the pregnancy progresses, the growing uterus exerts pressure on the stomach, further pushing its contents upward into the esophagus. This makes heartburn more common as pregnancy advances. Additionally, those who have experienced heartburn in previous pregnancies or those who suffer from heartburn when not pregnant are more likely to experience it during pregnancy.

## **Common Triggers of Heartburn**

Certain foods and drinks are known to trigger heartburn. Common culprits include:

Large meals

High-fat foods

Spicy foods

Chocolate

Citrus fruit juices

Caffeinated beverages such as coffee, tea, and cola

Alcohol \ (which is not recommended during pregnancy)

Other activities that can trigger heartburn include:

- Exercising soon after eating
- Lying down after meals
- Feeling anxious or stressed

Because each person is different, it's a good idea to keep track of which foods, drinks, or habits seem to make your heartburn worse.

### **Is Heartburn Harmful to the Baby?**

While heartburn can be very uncomfortable, it is not usually harmful to your baby. However, it can make it difficult to eat a healthy, balanced diet. Maintaining a healthy diet is important for both your well-being and the health of your baby, so if heartburn is interfering with your ability to eat properly, it's important to address it. With appropriate management, you should still be able to maintain your nutritional intake.

### **Preventing Heartburn**

There are several lifestyle changes you can make to help prevent or reduce heartburn during pregnancy:

- Eat smaller meals more frequently throughout the day and eat slowly.
- Avoid eating large meals just before exercise or bedtime, and try not to lie down immediately after eating.
- Avoid foods and drinks that trigger heartburn for you.
- Try not to eat and drink at the same time, as this can make your stomach feel overly full.
- Sit up straight while eating, and avoid lying down after meals.
- Elevate the head of your bed or sleep with at least two pillows to keep your upper body raised.
- Sleeping on your left side may help reduce heartburn.
- Chewing gum may help neutralize stomach acid by increasing saliva production.
- Drinking milk can also help neutralize acid and provide temporary relief.

### **Treatment Options**

If lifestyle changes don't alleviate heartburn, your doctor or midwife may recommend medicines to help manage symptoms. The first line of treatment for heartburn during pregnancy is antacids, which can quickly relieve symptoms. These are generally considered safe during pregnancy as long as you follow the recommended dosage. Several different types of antacids are available, so it's best to consult with your pharmacist to determine which one is most suitable for you.

If antacids don't provide sufficient relief, your doctor may suggest other medications to help manage the symptoms of heartburn. Be sure to consult your healthcare provider before taking any medications during pregnancy to ensure they are safe for you and your baby.

### **When to Consult a Doctor**

If your heartburn symptoms do not improve with lifestyle changes or medications, it is important to consult your doctor. Persistent heartburn can sometimes indicate more serious pregnancy conditions, such as pre-eclampsia, which can cause pain under the ribs and symptoms similar to heartburn. You should seek immediate medical attention if you experience any of the following:

- Vomiting blood
- Unexplained weight loss
- Difficulty swallowing or painful swallowing

These symptoms may indicate a more serious issue that requires further evaluation and treatment.

### **Tools And Assistance**

If you need more help managing heartburn or indigestion during pregnancy, consider the following:

- Speaking with your doctor or midwife for tailored advice and medication options.
- Asking your pharmacist about safe over-the-counter remedies during pregnancy.
- Using a wedge pillow to keep your upper body elevated while sleeping.
- Following a food diary to identify and eliminate triggers.

Exploring gentle prenatal yoga or relaxation techniques to reduce stress, which can worsen symptoms.

Joining prenatal support groups or online communities for shared experiences and tips.

These tools and strategies can make a significant difference in your comfort during pregnancy.