

You had a great time at the Mexican restaurant, enjoying a lively dinner with the family. All three of those stuffed tacos melted in your mouth. But now it's two hours later, and here comes the slow burn in your chest again. While there's always a possibility of a heart attack, without other key symptoms, chances are it's not. More than likely, it's gastroesophageal reflux disease — GERD.

Don't worry.

GERD usually goes by a more familiar term:

*chronic heartburn.*



## Medications

Avoiding trigger foods and behaviors may not be enough to help heartburn. Medications can treat heartburn symptoms and keep them away.

Below are some heartburn medications that are available without a prescription. If you're on other medications, check with your doctor first.

Antacids like Maalox<sup>®</sup>, Mylanta<sup>®</sup>, Tums<sup>®</sup> or Rolaids<sup>®</sup> provide rapid relief by buffering acid that your stomach has already produced. Relief usually lasts one to two hours. Gaviscon<sup>®</sup> is an antacid that also contains alginic acid, which prevents the reflux of acidic stomach contents into the esophagus.

Acid reducers such as Pepcid AC<sup>®</sup>, Pepcid Complete<sup>®</sup>, Zantac 75<sup>®</sup>, Axid AR<sup>®</sup> and Tagamet HB<sup>®</sup> have a longer-lasting effect — generally six to 10 hours. These medications are also available as cost-saving generics.



Proton pump inhibitors, or PPIs, significantly prevent the production of stomach acid by turning off active acid pumps. One dose of a PPI can provide effects that last up to 24 hours.



# Feel the burn?

Learn about chronic heartburn and what you can do to fight it.

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## Chronic heartburn

is the uncomfortable burning sensation that occurs when partially digested food and stomach acid back up into the esophagus and irritate its sensitive lining. It's a condition that affects more than 60 million people in the United States, and 7 million people unknowingly suffer from it.

**If you think you may be one of them, here's what to look for:**

- Difficulty swallowing
- Chronic cough, sore throat
- Sharp, burning sensation in the throat
- Feeling of food sticking in your throat or in the middle of your chest

**If you experience heartburn symptoms AND any of the symptoms below, seek medical attention immediately:**

- Cold sweat
- Gas-like pain, nausea
- Dizziness, fatigue or weakness
- Shortness of breath
- Pain that spreads to the neck, arms or jaw
- Chest pressure, tightening
- Bloating or discomfort in the abdomen
- Vomiting with or without blood
- Bowel movements with blood



## Treating chronic heartburn

One way to treat heartburn is to avoid the foods and behaviors that trigger attacks. To get started, try these tips:

### Watch what you eat.

Some foods can trigger heartburn. Avoid fatty or fried foods, citrus fruits or juices, tomato sauces, spicy foods, chocolate, peppermint, coffee, carbonated beverages and alcohol.

### Don't gorge.

Big meals stuff the stomach and can increase pressure on the muscle that keeps stomach acid out of the esophagus. Try four or five small snack-like meals instead.

### Lose weight.

Extra pounds increase pressure on the stomach and force acid up into the esophagus.

Talk to your doctor about your heartburn symptoms — especially if they get worse or more frequent — or if you experience extreme fatigue, weight loss or sudden difficulty swallowing.

### Chew gum or suck on candy.

Sucking candy or chewing gum stimulates the production of saliva, a natural buffer of stomach acids, which can help heartburn symptoms. Avoid peppermint candies and gums, which can do the opposite.

### Quit smoking.

Tobacco inhibits saliva, and may also stimulate stomach acid production and promote acid backup.

### Don't snack at bedtime.

Allow enough time for your stomach to empty before you lie down. It's better to eat at least two to three hours before bedtime.



### Raise the head of your bed.

Gravity helps to keep acid in the stomach where it should be. Raising the head of your bed six to eight inches on blocks may help.

### Wear loose-fitting clothes.

Tight clothes and belts can put pressure on your stomach, causing it to push acid into the esophagus.

### Watch your posture.

Avoid bending from the waist or stooping just after meals. Instead, try to bend from the knees, keeping the back straight. Eat your meals while sitting on an upright chair.