Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care System

NHS Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board

Patient Information Leaflet

Treating your Heartburn and Indigestion with Over The Counter (OTC) Medicines

This leaflet contains self-care information about Heartburn and Indigestion and how you can relieve occasional symptoms using medicines you can buy yourself, called over the counter (OTC) medicines. OTC medicines can be purchased from pharmacies and other retailers.

What is Heartburn and Indigestion?

Heartburn is a burning feeling in the chest caused by stomach acid travelling up towards the throat (acid reflux). Heartburn and acid reflux are the same thing and are a symptom of indigestion (dyspepsia). Most people have indigestion at some point. Usually, it's not a sign of anything more serious and you can treat it yourself.

What causes Heartburn and Indigestion?

There are common triggers or causes, such as: certain foods or drinks (usually spicy, fatty or acidic foods); being overweight; smoking; pregnancy; stress or anxiety; and some medicines (such as ibuprofen).

Common Symptoms

Indigestion can be felt in different ways. You can have the following symptoms after eating or drinking:

- Heartburn - a burning feeling in your chest which is caused by stomach acid travelling up towards your throat.
- Belching and bloating.
- Feeling sick.
- An unpleasant sour taste in your mouth, caused by stomach acid.

The severity of symptoms can vary from person to person. Some people can manage their symptoms by avoiding triggers and making lifestyle changes, and others may self-care with OTC medication, such as antacids, alginates (brands include Gaviscon (alginic acid) and Rennie (calcium carbonate and magnesium carbonate), or proton pump inhibitors (PPIs); (e.g. Omeprazole, Esomeprazole).

Managing your Heartburn and Indigestion

Do	Don't
✓ Do eat smaller, more frequent meals. ✓ Do cut down on tea, coffee, fizzy drinks or alcohol. ✓ Do raise your head and shoulders up when in bed – this can stop stomach acid coming up while you sleep. ✓ Do try to lose weight if you're overweight. ✓ Do try to find ways to relax. ✓ Do contact a healthcare professional for advice if you are pregnant. ✓ Do contact your GP if you start having to use medication regularly and long-term.	✘ Do not have food or drink that triggers your symptoms. ✘ Do not eat within 3 or 4 hours before bed. ✘ Do not wear clothes that are tight around your waist. ✘ Do not smoke or drink too much alcohol. ✘ Do not start taking ibuprofen or aspirin unless it has been prescribed for you (speak to a pharmacist or GP before you start taking these medicines, as they can make indigestion worse and if still required take with or after food).

How will treating my heartburn and indigestion with self-care affect me?
NHS England guidance advises that OTC products should not be routinely prescribed for certain conditions that can be managed by self-care or are a minor ailment. Based on this guidance, patients should purchase treatment for common, occasional heartburn and indigestion symptoms. More information is available on the Hertfordshire and West Essex ICB's website.

If you are experiencing occasional heartburn and indigestion symptoms, you should seek support from a pharmacist and/or buy OTC medication to treat your symptoms from a local pharmacy or other retailers. **It is important to always read the medication label, check the dosage and confirm whether suitable for children.**

Your local pharmacist can advise you on the most appropriate treatment for your symptoms and can suggest other ways to help manage your condition, **particularly if you take any other medicines or have any other medical conditions.** They will also be able to advise when you do need to see a doctor for your symptoms.

You should contact your GP practice if:

- Making lifestyle changes and OTC treatments are not helping.
- You keep getting indigestion
- You have ongoing chest or tummy pain.
- You have unexplained weight loss.
- You are being sick.
- You feel like you have difficulty swallowing.
- You have blood in your vomit or poo.
- You feel like you have a lump or swelling of your stomach.
- You have been diagnosed with iron deficiency anaemia.

If at any time you feel your symptoms are getting worse or not responding to treatment, contact your GP, go to 111.nhs.uk or call 111.

Helpful online resources:

NHS Website	Heartburn and acid reflux - NHS Indigestion - NHS Antacids - NHS Omeprazole: a medicine to treat heartburn and indigestion - NHS Esomeprazole: medicine to lower stomach acid - NHS
Patient Websites	Acid Reflux and Oesophagitis: Causes, Symptoms, & Treatment The foods to eat or avoid if you have heartburn Is it indigestion or something more serious?
You can also visit your local pharmacy for advice	