



Heartburn while pregnant

Heartburn has nothing to do with the heart. It has a lot to do with the esophagus, which is the tube that food goes down when you swallow it. The esophagus connects the throat to the stomach. On the way, it passes near the heart. Sometimes gastric acids flow back up from the stomach to the esophagus. This is called acid reflux, which can cause a burning feeling near the heart.



CAUSES

Heartburn happens a lot during the last 3 or 4 months of pregnancy. The growing uterus pushes the stomach upward. Food remains in the stomach longer. That's caused by changes in hormones. So there are more acids to flow back up the esophagus. Gaining too much weight adds to the problem. So do worry and fatigue.

Things that cause heartburn in general are:

- Aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen sodium, arthritis medicine, or cortisone. Don't take ibuprofen and naproxen sodium when pregnant. In fact, don't take any medicine unless your health care provider says it is okay.
- Eating too much and too fast
- Chocolate, garlic, onions, green pepper, tomatoes, citrus fruits and juices or peppermint
- Lying down after a meal
- Wearing tight clothes
- Smoking after eating. Don't smoke during pregnancy (or ever).
- Don't drink more than one cup of regular coffee a day when you are pregnant.
- Alcohol. (Don't drink during pregnancy.)
- Being overweight
- Swallowing air
- Stress
- Weak or faulty stomach valve
- Hiatal hernia. This is when the upper part of the stomach bulges through the diaphragm.



SELF-CARE

- Avoid the things you know cause you heartburn.
- Sit straight or stand up and walk around whenever you can. Don't bend over or lie down after eating. If you do, gastric acids can get into the esophagus. {**Note:** This is not a tip to follow if your health care provider says you must stay in bed.}
- If you have heartburn at night, raise your head with extra pillows.
- Wear slacks and skirts and maternity clothes that fit loosely. Go for comfort.
- Avoid wearing pantyhose.
- Eat several small meals through the day, not three large ones. Eat slowly.
- When you reach for something low, bend at the knees, not at the waist.
- Drink liquids in small amounts often through the day. Avoid drinking fluids with meals.
- Don't use straws.
- Limit foods and drinks that contain air. Examples: baked goods, waffles, whipped cream, soft drinks.
- Don't take baking soda. It may settle your stomach at first. But when it wears off, the acid comes back worse than before. Baking soda also has a high salt content. Salt causes your body to retain water. That can make your feet and ankles swell.
- Don't smoke during pregnancy (or ever). It could cause heartburn.
- Don't take medicines for heartburn that you can buy without a prescription. Examples: Tagamet HB and other "acid blockers." Tums, Maalox, Mylanta, etc. may be okay to try for heartburn. But check with your health care provider first. Taking too much of these can cause problems.

If you get no relief from Self-Care, call your health care provider. You could have a more serious health problem.

TRIAGE QUESTIONS



Are you throwing up blood or stuff that looks like coffee grounds?

NO

YES ► **GET EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE**



Are your stools very black and do they look like tar?

NO

YES ► **CALL DOCTOR**



Is it hard for you to swallow?

NO

YES ► **CALL DOCTOR**



USE SELF-CARE