

# Heartburn and indigestion

Heartburn is a burning sensation in the chest behind the breastbone. It is caused by acid from the stomach irritating the lining of the gullet (oesophagus).

Indigestion is discomfort in the upper part of the tummy (abdomen). It often happens after eating. It may be caused by stomach acid irritating the lining of the stomach.

Some drugs (such as [steroids](#) or anti-inflammatory painkillers) and some cancer treatments (such as [chemotherapy](#)) can also irritate the stomach lining.

You may also get indigestion if you do not eat or drink much, have a small stomach capacity or do not move around very much. Smoking, alcohol, and some foods can also cause indigestion or make it worse.

## Tips for managing heartburn and indigestion

- Chocolate, alcohol, fatty and spicy foods, fizzy drinks, chewing gum, hard-boiled sweets, and mint can all cause indigestion. Try to limit or avoid these and any other foods that cause you discomfort.
- Try to avoid large meals. Eating smaller meals more often can help.
- After eating, do not do any vigorous activity for at least 45 to 60 minutes.
- Try not to lie flat on your back, especially after meals. If you are in bed, use extra pillows or raise the head of the bed by a few inches to help keep you more upright after meals.
- Wear loose clothing around your waist.
- If you get indigestion at night, avoid eating a meal or drinking tea or coffee for 3 to 4 hours before you go to bed.
- Try to keep to a [healthy weight](#).
- There are medicines that can help. Talk to your GP or cancer doctor about what might be best for you.
- If you smoke, [try to stop or cut down](#). The NHS has a lot of information and support to help you give up smoking. Look on the NHS website for the country where you live.

## Macmillan Cancer Support resources

We have more information on our [website](#), including [audiobooks](#). Or you can order our free booklets and leaflets on [orders.macmillan.org.uk](https://orders.macmillan.org.uk) such as:

- MAC13613 [Eating problems and cancer](#)
- MAC13612 [Healthy eating and cancer](#)

We produce information in a [range of formats](#) and [languages](#). To order these, visit our website or call our support line on **0808 808 00 00**.

## Further Macmillan support

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm. Or visit [macmillan.org.uk](https://macmillan.org.uk) to [chat online](#) to one of our team.

Deaf or hard of hearing? Call using Relay UK on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the [Relay UK app](#). Speak another language? Telephone interpreters are available. Please tell us in English the language you would like to use.

If you want to share your experiences or ask questions, you can find others who understand on our [Online Community](#). Our free [Macmillan Buddy service](#) can arrange weekly calls with a friendly volunteer who understands what you're going through.

## Other useful contact details

- GUTS UK – visit [www.gutscharity.org.uk](https://www.gutscharity.org.uk)
- Oesophageal Patients' Association – visit [www.opa.org.uk](https://www.opa.org.uk)
- British Dietetic Association – visit [www.bda.uk.com](https://www.bda.uk.com)

## Notes and questions

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