

Plagued by Heartburn and Indigestion?
Some Natural Solutions to Help Stop “The Burn”



With some simple lifestyle changes, heartburn can become a memory. It all begins with a little knowledge, your kitchen cupboard, some of Mother Nature’s Bounty – and you.

What does heartburn feel like?

- A burning sensation behind the breastbone in the chest area which generally starts right after eating and lasts several minutes to a couple of hours. This sensation can intensify when bending over or lying down right after eating.
- Burning in the throat, or a hot, sour, acidic, or salty-tasting fluid at the back of the throat or the sensation of having difficulty swallowing.
- Chronic coughing, hoarseness, and a sore throat can develop over time.

What can cause heartburn?

- Simply put, it all comes down to what is put in the body!

How can I stop the “burn” and why?

Try making some simple habit changes and better food choices to help strengthen the body from within.

- **Eat Wisely, Eat Small:** Careful food choices support a healthy digestive process that can help avoid heartburn from even starting. Eating the wrong types of foods and too much of it in one sitting burdens the digestive system and can set you up for heartburn.
- **Chew Well, Small Bites:** Heartburn can easily begin from poor chewing habits. *One-third* of the entire digestive process starts when you take your first bite of food and begin to chew. Cutting food into smaller pieces can make it easier to chew thoroughly (20-30 times each bite), thus breaking the food down enough for the digestive system to work efficiently without needing to create more acidic digestive juices. Try putting your fork down between each bite to help you slow your chewing speed down. The body can absorb more nutrients with well-chewed food.
- **Drink Little:** When you drink water, tea, coffee, soda, or other beverages during your meal, the digestive juices in your stomach dilute making it necessary for the stomach to secrete more acidic digestive juices to compensate for the beverages you drank. Drinking fluids + too much stomach acid = heartburn!

- **The 3-Hour Limit:** You've heard it before; "don't eat just before you go to bed", right? Well, believe it. By not eating three-hours before bedtime, the digestive system has enough time to process what you ate for dinner so heartburn doesn't get a chance to start. By lying down in bed too quickly after a meal, acidic digestive juices from your stomach can flow up to your esophagus, giving you that painful burning sensation.

The Food, Spice, and Herbs of the Matter.

Poor eating habits create an unhealthy metabolism which heartburn is a symptom of. To keep the body in good working condition, the body needs a simple, but balanced, diet. Eating the proper foods from the following three food categories can help you get closer to being free from heartburn.

- **Primary Foods:** Proteins, whole grains and legumes (that have not been milled or refined, nor include any flour products). Proteins can come from animals (limited), tofu, tempeh, and beans. Primary foods should make up about 20-30% of your diet.
- **Secondary Foods:** Fresh seasonal vegetables, lightly cooked or raw should make up 30-40% of your daily food intake. Notice the word "seasonal". Eating products from different parts of the country when they are not in season in your area upsets the natural cycle your body has grown accustomed to for the area you live in. Added bonus: most vegetables are alkaline foods that allow the stomach to be less acidic while they neutralize the acids from the animal proteins you may eat.
- **Tertiary Foods:** This group of foods includes dairy, eggs, and fruit, and should make up about 5-10% of your daily food intake. Local fruits in season will suit the body better in helping avoid heartburn.

Why use herbs and spices?

Herbs, and products containing herbs, interact directly with the body and affect all systems of the body with their active constituents. Herbal foods, drinks, and medicines go through the digestive system into the bloodstream, while compresses, poultices, and herbal cosmetics are absorbed directly through our skin and then into the blood stream. Even herbal inhalants and aromatherapy oils pass into the blood via the nose.

- **Basil** - Great for indigestion!
- **Bay Leaf** - The supreme herb of soup! Add one or two to your soup to help prevent gas and indigestion from beans and legumes.
- **Caraway** – Another great herb for indigestion and gas
- **Cardamom** – Used in chai tea
- **Cayenne**– Can be taken daily as a tonic (one-quarter teaspoon 3 times daily) to help prevent indigestion, or just add it to soups and even veggies. Start very slowly!

- **Cinnamon** – Try simmering cinnamon (one teaspoon) in about 1-1/2 cups milk, add a little honey, and sip it. A very calming drink that works well for indigestion.
- **Cumin**– Another great spice to add to cooked beans to avoid gas and the possibly of heartburn.
- **Fennel** – A good herb to calm heartburn when used in teas (see recipe below).
- **Ginger** – Very good for indigestion. Grate one-ounce of fresh ginger root and simmer ten minutes in a pint of water. Sip on the beverage over a couple of hours.
- **Rosemary** – One of the best tasting herbs in cooking. Can be used for indigestion by adding ½ ounce of rosemary to a pint of boiled water and steeping it for 10 minutes in a covered teapot or pan. Simply sip and enjoy!

Some Other Herbal Options

(You can usually get the ingredients from your local health food store.)

For Indigestion after a Meal

Make a tea by using a pinch each of powder of aniseed, ginger, cardamom, cinnamon, and a very small pinch of black pepper. Steep in boiled hot water or scalded milk. A cup can be taken after meals to help digestion.

Heartburn Formula (Can be increased)

2 parts Marshmallow Root
 6 parts Hawthorn Berries
 3 parts Peppermint
 6 parts Wild Yam Root
 3 parts Fennel Seed
 3 parts Ginger Root

Simmer the marshmallow root, hawthorn berries, and wild yam root (one-quart water for every three ounces of herbs) for about twenty minutes. Remove from heat and add the peppermint, fennel seed, and ginger root. Let steep ten minutes. Strain and drink one-half cup to one cup after meals or more often as needed.

For Stomach Acidity

As a decoction (tea) or in gelatin capsules, use:

1 part Dandelion Root
 1 part Slippery Elm
 1/8 part Goldenseal
 1/8 part Calamus root

Take one-half cup of the tea or two gelatin capsules of the powders every hour as needed.

Putting it all together

A comprehensive list of what to do

- Relax, when you eat! In fact, turn off the TV and turn on the music.
- Cut your food into small, easily chewed pieces and chew each bite thoroughly.
- Don't drink beverages during your meal, or very little if you must.
- Familiarize yourself with the things that give you heartburn and avoid them.
- Eat to maintain a healthy digestive system. Choose proper foods, in the correct proportions, from the primary, secondary, and tertiary food groups.
- Remember that herbs and spices contain many vitamins and minerals, and are natural, effective agents in helping combat heartburn. Try them in cooking . . . ***try them in healing.***

References

- Mabey, R. (1988). *The New Age Herbalist*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Michael Tierra, L. O. (1998). *The Way of Herbs*. New York, NY: First Pocket Books.