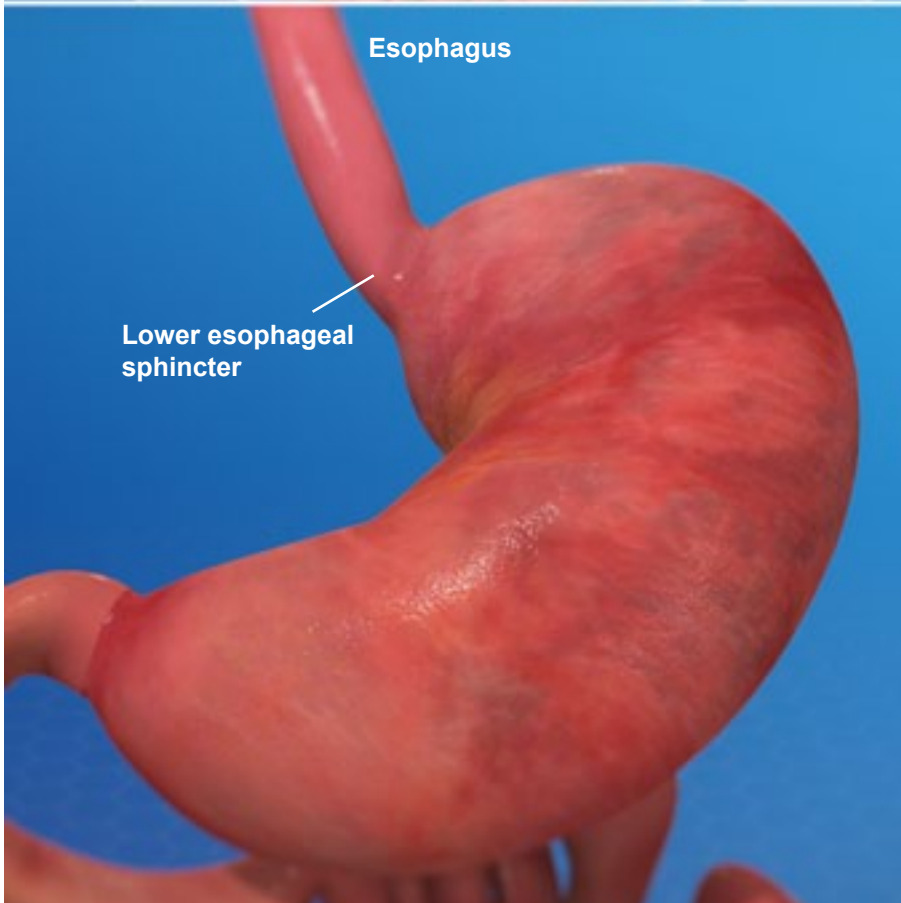


## Heartburn



### Overview

This is a burning sensation in your chest. It is related to your digestive system. Most people experience heartburn occasionally, and have only mild discomfort. But for some, it can be a chronic and painful problem.

### Causes

Heartburn is caused by a leak of stomach acid. When you swallow, food and liquid pass down your esophagus. This is the tube that travels from your throat to your stomach. At the base of your esophagus is a tight band of muscle that acts as a valve. Normally, it relaxes to allow food and liquid to pass into your stomach and then clamps shut to trap the contents inside. But sometimes acid can be pushed up through this opening. The acid irritates the lining of your esophagus, causing the sensation of heartburn. In some people, this valve may be abnormally weak, or it may function poorly. This can result in a type of severe, chronic heartburn called gastroesophageal reflux disease, which is commonly called "GERD."

### Triggers and Risk Factors

Heartburn can be triggered by certain foods. Spicy foods, fatty foods, citrus and tomato products are common culprits. It can be triggered by alcohol, caffeine and carbonated drinks. You have a higher risk for heartburn if you are overweight. And it can be a problem for women during pregnancy.

### Symptoms

Symptoms of heartburn may include a burning pain in your chest. This may be worse after eating. It may be worse when you lie down. You may also have a sour, bitter taste in your mouth. If you have GERD, you may have symptoms such as chest pain, a dry cough and a sore throat. You may have difficulty swallowing. You may be hoarse.

### Treatment

Treatment options depend on the frequency and the severity of your heartburn. You may benefit from antacids or from medications that reduce stomach acid. You may benefit from losing weight. Avoid foods and drinks that trigger your heartburn. You may want to avoid lying down for several hours after a meal. If you have GERD, you may need stronger medications. You may benefit from a surgical procedure. Your healthcare provider can develop a care plan that is right for your needs.