

Living With and Beyond Cancer Information Sheet

11. Indigestion and Heartburn

Heartburn is a burning sensation behind the breastbone. It can be very painful. It is caused when acid from the stomach irritates the lining of the gullet (oesophagus).

Indigestion is discomfort in the upper part of the tummy (abdomen), especially after meals. It can happen when stomach acid irritates the lining of the stomach or small bowel. Most indigestion is related to diet, so it is important to avoid eating lots of fatty, rich or processed foods.

Indigestion can sometimes be a symptom of stomach and oesophageal cancers, but it is more often caused by other factors not related to the cancer itself. Steroids and many cancer treatments including radiotherapy and chemotherapy may irritate the stomach causing indigestion. There may be a pre-existing condition, such as a hiatus hernia, causing the indigestion. Other factors include having a small stomach, over production of stomach acid, not moving around enough, heightened anxiety (ie irritable bowel syndrome) and eating and drinking too much.

How can I manage my indigestion?

- Talk to your doctor. They can try and find out the cause and prescribe medicines to help reduce or relieve it for you, such as simple antacid medicines or proton pump inhibitors.
- Most indigestion is related to diet and can be easily treated. It is important to avoid eating lots of fatty, rich or processed foods.
- Eating small, regular meals (every 3-4 hours) and snacks, rather than 3 big meals a day is often helpful.
- Eat slowly and chew food thoroughly to assist digestion and avoid drinking large volumes at mealtimes.
- If you smoke, try to stop or cut down. The chemicals in cigarette smoke may make indigestion worse.
- Keeping a diary can be useful to identify if you suffer from indigestion at any particular times of the day or if there is a particular trigger.
- A small amount of activity can help (i.e. taking a short walk) but try to limit activity and remain upright for 45-60 minutes after a meal.
- Include fermented foods such as live yoghurt, sauerkraut and miso paste or take a probiotic supplement. They may provide beneficial bacteria to support health. **You may need to avoid these during chemotherapy treatment, ask your medical team for advice.**
- Stress and anxiety can increase the likelihood of suffering with indigestion. Relaxation methods can be helpful.
- Large meals, chocolate, alcohol, fatty and spicy foods, fizzy drinks, chewing gum, boiled sweets, mint, dill, and aniseed are all known to cause problems. Try and limit or avoid these if possible.
- Achieving and maintaining a healthy weight can help to limit or resolve indigestion.

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11. Indigestion and Heartburn - Resources/Information

Local Resources:

GP	
Pharmacist -Boots Macmillan Information Pharmacist	Barnstaple, Northam, Bideford, South Molton & Ilfracombe

National Resources:

<p>Penny Brohn, Chapel Pill Lane, Pill, Bristol BS20 0HH Confidential helpline : 0303 3000 118 and press 1 Weekdays 09.30– 5:00pm Email: helpline@pennybrohn.org.uk https://www.pennybrohn.org.uk/services/</p>	<p>Offers complimentary approaches and self-help techniques including the 'Bristol approach for living with and beyond cancer including their approach to diet. The link below is a guide to supporting health with good nutrition for people affected by cancer https://www.pennybrohn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Healthy-Eating-Guidelines-2017.pdf</p>
<p>NHS Choices— https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/</p>	<p>For general information on healthy eating</p>
<p>Oesophageal Patients Association https://www.opa.org.uk/</p>	<p>For patients, their carers and family affected by oesophageal cancers</p>
<p>Macmillan Cancer Support Line www.macmillan.org.uk Call 0808 808 00 00 — 7 days a week 8am—8pm</p>	<p>Calls are free of charge from all consumer landlines and mobile phones plus all mobile networks. Please note that calls to this number are not free when made from outside the UK. If you are calling from outside of the UK call on +44 207 091 2230</p>
<p>Macmillan on-line Community</p>	<p>Online support— to share experiences or vent your emotions find others who understand—join today!</p>
<p>Marie Curie Support Line — Living with a terminal illness and looking for support www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/marie-curie-support</p>	<p>Calls are free of charge from all consumer landlines and mobile phones plus all mobile networks. The Support Line is open 8am – 6pm Monday to Friday and 11am – 5pm Saturday</p>

Other Resources :

Macmillan Booklets	Recipes for people affected by cancer - MAC15201_E6
	Healthy Eating and Cancer - MAC13612
	How are you feeling? - MAC11593
	Understanding chemotherapy - MAC11619_E15
	Understanding radiotherapy - MAC11640
	Eating problems and cancer - MAC13613