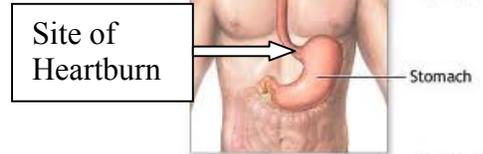


Family Medicine Clerkship Plain Language Summary Template

Title: When heartburn may not be just heartburn

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Plain Language Summary:



What is heartburn?

Heartburn can happen when liquid in your stomach escapes into the tube connecting your stomach and your mouth. When you eat, the stomach tries to break up the food by mixing it with the liquid in the stomach. When the stomach is really full, like after eating a large meal, some of this liquid may slosh out of the stomach into the tube (esophagus) that connects the stomach and the mouth. Eventually, people may notice this feeling after lying down in the evening, or it may even wake them up at night.

What does heartburn feel like?

Heartburn is a burning feeling in your chest. Heartburn can be painful. Some people may confuse heartburn with heart pain and think that they are having a heart attack. Some people may also have a sour taste in their mouths, or feel like their food is coming back up.

Is heartburn dangerous?

Not usually. Heartburn is very common and it is usually nothing to worry about. However, if you have heartburn, there are certain signs that you should look for because they can sometimes mean there is something more serious going on.

If I have heartburn, what signs should I tell my doctor about?

3 signs are very important:

1. If you have *trouble swallowing* – liquid or food, or if you begin choking a lot, you should tell your doctor. Also
2. If you begin to *feel tired every day*, you should see your doctor.
3. Even if you do not have heartburn and begin to lose weight *when you're not trying to lose weight*, then you should see your doctor.

If I have these signs, what will my doctor do?

If you have a little trouble swallowing, your doctor may start you on a medicine to help your heartburn. If this cures your heartburn, and you no longer have trouble swallowing then you can stay on this medicine to take care of those problems. No other tests will be done at this time.

If you have a lot of trouble swallowing or if the medicine that the doctor gives you does not get rid of your heartburn, then your doctor will most likely send you to another doctor who will perform a test to help see if there is anything wrong.

The test can be a little uncomfortable. The doctor uses a very small and flexible tube with a camera on the end. After giving you pain medication and medicine to help you relax, the tube will be passed through your nose or mouth and into your throat. After this point, most people don't feel anything. The doctor passes the tube down toward your stomach,

using the camera to look around. If the doctor finds something unusual, he or she may take a sample of it. This can also be done through the tube – don't worry you won't feel anything. After the doctor is done looking around, the tube is pulled back up toward your nose and is taken out.

What is the doctor looking for?

The doctor is looking for many different things, but what he or she is most concerned about is cancer. **This type of cancer is rare**, but since we do not have a good way to find it, when someone has signs like trouble swallowing, weight loss, or tire easily and they have heartburn, then we look for it just to make sure it's not there.

I still have questions, where can I go for more information?

Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease: National Institute of Health

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001311/>

Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease: Mayo Clinic

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/gerd/DS00967>

5 key words:

GERD

Heartburn

Esophageal cancer

Trouble swallowing

Upper GI endoscopy

This document was created by a medical student enrolled in the Family Medicine Clerkship at the University of Minnesota Medical School as part of the course project. The aim of the project is to present information on a medical topic in the format of a patient education handout. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Minnesota Medical School physicians and faculty. These materials are provided for informational purposes only and are in no way intended to take the place of the advice and recommendations of your personal health care provider. The information provided may no longer be up-to-date since it has not been reviewed since the date of creation. The information provided should not be used to diagnose a health problem or disease, or as a means of determining treatment. In the event of a medical emergency, immediately contact a doctor or call 911.