



National Institute of  
Diabetes and Digestive  
and Kidney Diseases



# Indigestion (Dyspepsia)

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## Definition & Facts


### What is indigestion?

Indigestion, also called dyspepsia or upset [stomach](#), is a general term that describes a group of [gastrointestinal symptoms](#) that occur together. These symptoms most often include

- pain, a burning feeling, or discomfort in your upper [abdomen](#)
- feeling full too soon while eating a meal
- feeling uncomfortably full after eating a small amount of food
- [bloating](#), [nausea](#), or [belching](#)

Indigestion may happen from time to time or be chronic, happening regularly for a few weeks or months. Indigestion is not always related to eating.

Indigestion is not a disease. However, indigestion may be a sign of certain [digestive tract](#) diseases or conditions.

Sometimes digestive tract diseases such as [peptic ulcers](#), [gastritis](#), and [stomach cancer](#)  cause chronic indigestion. However, most often doctors do not know what [causes chronic indigestion](#). Chronic indigestion without a health problem or digestive tract disease that could explain symptoms is called functional dyspepsia.

Indigestion may be confused with other conditions, such as [acid reflux](#), also called heartburn, or [gastroparesis](#).

# How common is indigestion?

Indigestion is a common condition, affecting up to 20% of people in the United States each year.<sup>1</sup>

Among people in the United States who see a doctor about indigestion, about 7 in 10 are diagnosed with functional dyspepsia.<sup>2</sup>

## Who is more likely to have indigestion?


You are more likely to have indigestion if you

- are female
- feel stressed
- have certain health problems or digestive tract diseases
- smoke
- take certain medicines, such as [nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs \(NSAIDs\)](#)

In most cases, indigestion does not lead to health problems. However, having indigestion may affect your quality of life.

## References

[1] Tack, J. Chapter 32: Approach to the patient with dyspepsia and related functional gastrointestinal complaints. In: *Yamada's Textbook of Gastroenterology*. 7th ed. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd; 2022:560–566.

[2] Aziz I, Palsson OS, Tornblom H, Sperber AD, Whitehead WE, Simren M. Epidemiology, clinical characteristics, and associations for symptom-based Rome IV functional dyspepsia in adults in the USA, Canada, and the UK: a cross-sectional population-based study. *Lancet Gastroenterology Hepatology*. 2018;3(4):252–262. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29396034/> 

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## Symptoms & Causes

### What are the symptoms of indigestion?

When you have indigestion, you may have one or more of the following symptoms

- pain, a burning feeling, or discomfort in your upper [abdomen](#)
- feeling full too soon while eating a meal
- feeling uncomfortably full after a small amount of food
- [bloating](#), [nausea](#), or [belching](#)

Sometimes when you have indigestion, you may also have [heartburn](#). However, heartburn and indigestion are two separate conditions.



When you have indigestion, you may have pain, a burning feeling, or discomfort in your upper abdomen.

## When should I seek help from a doctor?

If you have indigestion and any of the following symptoms, you may have a more serious condition. See a doctor right away if you have

- pain in your chest, jaw, neck, or arm
- difficulty swallowing or painful swallowing
- frequent [vomiting](#)
- bloody vomit
- severe and constant pain in your abdomen
- long-lasting bloating or swelling in your abdomen
- shortness of breath
- weight loss without trying or loss of appetite
- yellowing of your eyes or skin
- black, tarlike [stools](#)

You should also see a doctor if your indigestion doesn't get better.

# What causes indigestion?

Doctors don't know what causes people to have indigestion from time to time. Most cases of chronic indigestion are diagnosed as functional dyspepsia, which is a disorder of how the gut and brain interact. In some cases, chronic indigestion has other causes.

## Functional dyspepsia

Functional dyspepsia is a disorder of gut–brain interaction. These disorders are related to problems with how the brain and gut work together. Disorders of gut–brain interaction are not diseases. They are groups of symptoms that occur together.

In most cases, experts do not know what causes this disorder. Some research suggests that the following factors may play a role

- certain foods and drinks
- problems in the first part of your [small intestine](#), including [inflammation](#) and being overly sensitive to stomach acids
- problems with the stomach's ability to relax and expand with food
- mental health problems, such as [anxiety](#) [NIH](#) and [depression](#) [NIH](#)
- [genes](#)—traits passed from parent to child
- pain from the normal functions of the [stomach](#)

## Other causes

Some medicines may cause indigestion, such as

- certain antibiotics—medicines that kill [bacteria](#)
- [nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs \(NSAIDs\)](#)
- [iron supplements](#) [NIH](#)
- medicines used to treat [osteoporosis](#) [NIH](#) and other bone conditions
- glucagon-like peptide 1 (GLP-1) receptor agonists—medicines used to treat [diabetes](#) or [obesity](#)
- [corticosteroids](#), also called steroids

Health problems and [digestive tract](#) diseases and conditions may also cause indigestion. The most common of these include

- [peptic ulcers](#)
- [Helicobacter pylori](#) (*H. pylori*) or other infections such as *Salmonella*, *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*), *Campylobacter*, *Giardia*, or norovirus

Specific foods or drinks are not thought to cause indigestion. However, certain [foods or drinks](#) may lead to symptoms for some people with functional dyspepsia.

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# Diagnosis

## How do doctors diagnose the cause of indigestion?

Your doctor may use your symptoms, a medical and family history, a physical exam, and tests to diagnose the cause of indigestion.

### Review of your symptoms

Your doctor will ask about your [symptoms](#) to diagnose the cause of indigestion. Your doctor may diagnose [functional dyspepsia](#) if you have pain, a burning feeling, or discomfort in your upper [abdomen](#), or feeling full too soon while eating a meal, and another cause for your indigestion can't be found. Your doctor may also ask how long you've had symptoms. Your doctor may diagnose functional dyspepsia if<sup>3</sup>

- you've had symptoms at least once a week in the last 3 months, and
- your symptoms first started at least 6 months ago

Your doctor may diagnose functional dyspepsia even if you've had symptoms for a shorter length of time. You should talk with your doctor if your symptoms are like the symptoms of functional dyspepsia.

### Medical and family history

To help diagnose the cause of indigestion, your doctor will take a medical and family history. Your doctor may ask about

- your medical history, including any past indigestion or [Helicobacter pylori \(H. pylori\)](#) infections
- your symptoms, such as whether symptoms occur with meals
- your history of any mental health conditions, such as [depression](#) [NIH](#) or [anxiety](#) [NIH](#)
- medicines you take, especially [nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs \(NSAIDs\)](#), [proton pump inhibitors](#), and [calcium](#)
- your family history of indigestion, *H. pylori* infection, or [cancer](#) [NIH](#) in the [digestive tract](#)





Your doctor will review your symptoms and medical history.

## Physical exam

During a physical exam, your doctor may

- check for [bloating](#)
- listen to sounds in your abdomen using a stethoscope
- tap on your abdomen to check for tenderness, pain, and lumps
- look for yellowing of your eyes or skin

## What tests do doctors use to diagnose the cause of indigestion?

Doctors may use medical tests to help find the cause of indigestion. If specific causes are not found, your doctor may diagnose functional dyspepsia and recommend treatments.

## Upper GI endoscopy

Your doctor may perform an [upper gastrointestinal \(GI\) endoscopy](#) to diagnose diseases and conditions that may be causing your indigestion, such as

- [gastritis](#)
- [peptic ulcer](#)
- [stomach cancer](#) [NIH](#) or cancer in another part of the digestive tract

A doctor may recommend an upper GI endoscopy for people with indigestion who have

- a family history of cancer
- current or past heavy alcohol use
- difficulty swallowing
- evidence of [bleeding in the digestive tract](#)
- frequent [vomiting](#)
- weight loss

During an upper GI endoscopy, a doctor uses an endoscope—a flexible tube with a camera—to see the lining of your [upper GI tract](#). Your doctor may pass small tweezers through the [endoscope](#) to take pieces of tissue from the lining of your [stomach](#) and [duodenum](#). This procedure is called an upper GI biopsy. A trained specialist known as a [pathologist](#) will review the tissue samples to look for digestive tract diseases and conditions, including *H. pylori* infection.

## Imaging tests

Your doctor may use imaging tests such as [x-rays](#) [NIH](#), [computed tomography scans \(CT\)](#) [NIH](#), or [ultrasound](#) [NIH](#) to look for diseases and conditions in your digestive tract that may be causing your indigestion.

## *H. pylori* testing

Your doctor may find an *H. pylori* infection by performing an upper GI biopsy. Your doctor may also use a

- [stool test](#). Your doctor may use a stool test to look for signs of an *H. pylori* infection or to see if *H. pylori* treatment has worked.
- urea breath test. Your doctor may use a urea breath test to check for *H. pylori* infection. For the test, you will swallow a capsule, liquid, or pudding that contains [urea](#) “labeled” with a special carbon atom. After a few minutes, you will breathe into a container, and a health care professional will confirm whether you have an *H. pylori* infection in your digestive tract.
- blood test. A health care professional may take a blood sample from you and send the sample to a lab to test for signs of *H. pylori* infection.

## Reference

[3] Drossman, DA. Appendix A: Rome IV diagnostic criteria for functional gastrointestinal disorders. In: *Rome IV: Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders—Disorders of Gut-Brain Interaction*. 4th ed. The Rome Foundation; 2017: appendix A.

# Treatment

## How do doctors treat indigestion?

How doctors treat indigestion depends on the cause. Your doctor may recommend over-the-counter or prescription medicines, changing what you [eat and drink](#), or mental health therapies.

### Medicines

You can buy many medicines to treat indigestion without a prescription, such as [H2 blockers](#) or [proton pump inhibitors \(PPIs\)](#). However, if your indigestion doesn't get better, you should see your doctor.

Depending on the cause of your indigestion, your doctor may recommend or prescribe

- medicines to treat a [Helicobacter pylori \(H. pylori\)](#) infection. Doctors may give you more than one type of [antibiotic](#) at the same time or combine antibiotics with other types of medicine.
- medicines to lower the amount of acid your [stomach](#) makes, including PPIs or H2 blockers. You can buy these medicines over the counter, or your doctor may prescribe one. Your doctor may prescribe PPIs to treat functional dyspepsia for a longer period of time.
- [antidepressants](#) [NIH](#) or [anti-anxiety medications](#) [NIH](#), which may ease the pain from indigestion.
- [prokinetics](#), which help your stomach empty faster.
- medicines to reduce [nausea](#) and [vomiting](#), if you have these symptoms with your indigestion.
- [supplements](#) [NIH](#), such as peppermint oil and caraway oil.

For safety reasons, talk with your doctor before using [dietary supplements](#) [NIH](#) or any other [complementary or alternative](#) [NIH](#) medicines or practices.

### Mental health therapies

[Anxiety](#) [NIH](#) and [depression](#) [NIH](#) may play a role in functional dyspepsia. Your doctor may recommend mental health therapies or other ways to help you reduce your stress, such as [meditation](#) [NIH](#), [relaxation exercises](#) [NIH](#), or counseling.

### Changes to your medicines

If your indigestion is caused by a medicine, your doctor may recommend changes to the medicines you take.

### Treating other health problems



If your indigestion is caused by other health problems, your doctor may treat the underlying condition first to improve indigestion symptoms.




# Eating, Diet, & Nutrition

## How can my diet help prevent or relieve indigestion?

Your doctor may recommend changes to what you eat and drink to help treat conditions that cause indigestion. You may also need to avoid foods and drinks that may lead to symptoms or make symptoms worse.

Your doctor may recommend certain [supplements](#) [NIH](#) , such as peppermint oil or caraway oil to improve your symptoms. For safety reasons, talk with your doctor before using dietary supplements, such as vitamins, or any [complementary or alternative](#) [NIH](#)  medicines or medical practices.


## What should I eat and drink if I have indigestion?

If you have indigestion, you should choose [healthy foods and drinks](#) . Talk with your doctor about a healthy eating plan that may work for you.

## What should I avoid eating or drinking if I have functional dyspepsia?

Some people who have functional dyspepsia find that certain foods or drinks lead to symptoms or make symptoms worse. Different people may find that different foods or drinks lead to their symptoms. Some foods and drinks that may lead to indigestion include

- carbonated, or fizzy, drinks
- grain and wheat products
- foods and drinks that contain caffeine
- fruits and fruit juices
- fatty or greasy foods

Talk with your doctor or a [registered dietitian](#) about which foods or drinks seem to increase your symptoms. Your doctor or dietitian may recommend a [healthy eating plan](#)  that limits certain foods or drinks to see if dyspepsia symptoms improve. Following a healthy eating plan can help ensure that your body gets the nutrients it needs. Ask your doctor about the cost of a dietitian's services. If you have health insurance, check your insurance company's website or call customer service to find out if they will pay for some or all of these services.

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## Clinical Trials

NIDDK conducts and supports clinical trials in many diseases and conditions, including digestive diseases. The trials look to find new ways to prevent, detect, or treat disease and improve quality of life.

# What are clinical trials for indigestion?

Clinical trials—and other types of [clinical studies](#) [NIH](#)—are part of medical research and involve people like you. When you volunteer to take part in a clinical study, you help doctors and researchers learn more about disease and improve health care for people in the future.

Researchers are studying many aspects of indigestion, such as

- causes of indigestion
- medicines used to treat indigestion or dyspepsia
- the link between mental health problems and digestive problems like indigestion

[Find out if clinical studies are right for you](#) [NIH](#).

Watch a video of NIDDK Director Dr. Griffin P. Rodgers explaining the importance of participating in clinical trials.

## Why Should I Join a Clinical Trial?



## What clinical studies for indigestion are looking for participants?

You can view a filtered list of clinical studies on indigestion that are federally funded, open, and recruiting at [ClinicalTrials.gov](#) [NIH](#). You can expand or narrow the list to include clinical studies from industry, universities, and individuals; however, the National Institutes of Health does not review these studies and

cannot ensure they are safe for you. Always talk with your health care provider before you participate in a clinical study.

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