

Heartburn

What Is Heartburn?

Heartburn is a common condition that causes a burning sensation in your chest, usually after eating or when lying down. It occurs when stomach acid flows back into your oesophagus (food pipe), irritating its lining. While occasional heartburn is normal, frequent or severe episodes may indicate an underlying condition, such as gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD). At Birmingham Gastroenterology Clinic, we provide expert care to diagnose and treat heartburn, helping you find lasting relief.

What Causes Heartburn?

Heartburn happens when the lower oesophageal sphincter (LOS), the valve between your stomach and oesophagus, doesn't close properly. This allows stomach acid to flow back into your oesophagus, causing discomfort. Common triggers include:

- Eating large meals, especially close to bedtime
- Spicy, fatty, or acidic foods
- Alcohol, coffee, or fizzy drinks
- Smoking
- Being overweight or pregnant
- Lying down or bending over after eating

Certain medications, such as anti-inflammatory painkillers (NSAIDs) or some blood pressure drugs, may also contribute to heartburn.

What Are The Symptoms Of Heartburn?

The most common symptom of heartburn is a burning sensation in your chest, often felt behind the breastbone. Other symptoms may include:

- A sour or bitter taste in your mouth
- Regurgitation of food or stomach acid
- Difficulty swallowing
- A persistent cough or hoarseness
- Feeling bloated or overly full

If you experience heartburn frequently or if it significantly affects your daily life, it's important to seek medical advice.

When To Seek Urgent Help

Although rare, heartburn can sometimes signal a more serious condition. Contact a doctor immediately if you experience:

- Difficulty swallowing
- Unexplained weight loss

- Vomiting, particularly if it contains blood
- Black or tar-like stools (a sign of internal bleeding)
- Severe or persistent chest pain

How Is Heartburn Investigated?

At Birmingham Gastroenterology Clinic, we use advanced diagnostic tools to identify the cause of your heartburn and rule out serious conditions. Common tests include:

- **Upper GI endoscopy:** A thin, flexible tube with a camera examines your oesophagus and stomach for abnormalities.
- **Oesophageal pH monitoring:** This measures acid levels in your oesophagus over 24 hours.
- **Oesophageal manometry:** This evaluates the strength and coordination of the muscles in your oesophagus.

How Can You Manage Heartburn?

For occasional heartburn, lifestyle changes can often reduce symptoms:

- Eat smaller meals and avoid heavy meals at night
- Limit spicy, fatty, or acidic foods, as well as caffeine and alcohol
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Quit smoking to reduce reflux risk
- Elevate the head of your bed while sleeping
- Avoid lying down for at least 2-3 hours after eating

Over-the-counter antacids or acid reducers can provide temporary relief. If symptoms persist, a doctor may recommend additional treatments.

What Are The Treatment Options For Heartburn?

When lifestyle changes and over-the-counter treatments aren't enough, your doctor may suggest:

- **Proton pump inhibitors (PPIs):** These reduce stomach acid and promote healing of the oesophagus.
- **H2 blockers:** Medications that lower stomach acid levels.
- **Surgery:** In severe cases, procedures like fundoplication may be performed to strengthen the LES.

Your treatment plan will depend on the underlying cause and severity of your symptoms, ensuring you get the most effective care.

Why Choose Birmingham Gastroenterology Clinic?

At Birmingham Gastroenterology Clinic, we are experts in diagnosing and managing heartburn and related conditions. Using state-of-the-art equipment and personalised treatment plans, our experienced team is dedicated to helping you achieve lasting relief and improve your quality of life.

Contact Us

If you're struggling with persistent or severe heartburn, contact Birmingham Gastroenterology Clinic today to book a consultation. Early diagnosis and treatment can help you take control of your symptoms and protect your digestive health.