

# Is It Heartburn or a Heart Attack?

Heart attack and heartburn: Both sound like they involve problems with your heart. But only one of them does.

A **heart attack** occurs when something blocks the flow of blood to your heart. It's always an emergency.

**Heartburn** happens when your stomach juices travel backward up your esophagus. It doesn't involve your heart — and it's not an emergency.

Unfortunately, these two similar-sounding problems also share some symptoms. So it can be tricky to tell them apart.

## What does heartburn feel like?

Normally, a bundle of muscles between your esophagus and your stomach opens to let food in, then closes to prevent food and stomach juices from coming back up. Heartburn occurs when this gateway is weak or doesn't close tightly.

Symptoms may include:

- A burning discomfort behind the breastbone
- Pain that moves upward toward the neck or throat
- A bitter or sour taste in the back of the throat
- A small amount of stomach contents rising up into the back of your throat

Heartburn symptoms often appear after eating or lying down. And they may be relieved by taking antacids — or even just belching.

## What does a heart attack feel like?

A heart attack occurs when plaque in your arteries constricts or completely shuts down blood flow to your heart.

Common symptoms may include:

- Discomfort in the center of the chest — such as crushing pain, pressure, squeezing or fullness
- Pain that spreads from the chest to the arms, jaw, back, shoulder, neck or stomach
- Breaking out in a cold sweat or feeling dizzy or lightheaded

During a heart attack, many women do have chest pain. But they are more likely than men to have less typical symptoms. These may include upper abdominal pain, shortness of breath, nausea, vomiting, fatigue, fainting or what feels like indigestion.

Older adults and people with diabetes may also have less typical symptoms without chest pain.

If you're not sure whether your symptoms are due to heartburn or a heart attack, always err on the side of safety — and call 911 right away.

