

Indigestion (dyspepsia)

What is indigestion?

Indigestion, also known as **dyspepsia**, can mean different things depending on the situation. It is often a symptom of another condition, such as acid reflux, ulcers, or gallstones, and may indicate a problem with your digestive system. In some cases, indigestion itself can be a condition, where no specific cause is found, but it still leads to discomfort or pain in your upper abdomen. Symptoms might include bloating, heartburn, nausea, or feeling full after eating. If you experience frequent or severe indigestion, it's important to seek medical advice to identify the cause and get the right treatment.

What causes indigestion?

Indigestion can occur for various reasons, ranging from lifestyle factors to underlying medical conditions. Common causes include:

- **Overeating or eating too quickly:** Large or rushed meals can strain your digestive system.
- **Fatty, spicy, or acidic foods:** Certain foods can irritate the stomach lining.
- **Alcohol or caffeine:** These can increase stomach acid production, leading to discomfort.
- **Smoking:** Smoking weakens the lower oesophageal sphincter (LOS), making reflux more likely.
- **Stress and anxiety:** Emotional stress can affect your digestion.
- **Medications:** Some painkillers (e.g., NSAIDs), antibiotics, and iron supplements can irritate your stomach.

In some cases, indigestion may be linked to underlying conditions such as:

- **Gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD):** Chronic acid reflux causing heartburn and regurgitation
- **Peptic ulcers:** Open sores in the lining of your stomach or small intestine
- **Hiatus hernia:** When part of the stomach pushes into the chest, causing acid reflux
- **Helicobacter pylori (H. pylori) infection:** A bacterial infection that can irritate the stomach lining
- **Gallstones** or other gallbladder issues

What are the symptoms of indigestion?

Indigestion symptoms can vary from person to person but commonly include:

- A burning or painful sensation in your upper abdomen (heartburn or discomfort)
- Feeling bloated or full, even after eating small amounts
- Excessive burping or passing wind

- Nausea or feeling sick
- A sour or bitter taste in your mouth caused by acid reflux
- Gurgling sounds or a heavy feeling in the stomach

If your symptoms persist for more than three weeks, worsen over time, or interfere with your daily life, you should seek medical advice.

When to seek urgent medical attention

You should contact a doctor immediately if you experience:

- Difficulty swallowing (dysphagia)
- Unexplained weight loss
- Vomiting, particularly if it contains blood or looks like coffee grounds
- Black or tar-like stools, which may indicate internal bleeding
- Severe or persistent abdominal pain

These symptoms could be signs of a more serious condition, and prompt medical attention is essential.

How is indigestion diagnosed?

At Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic, we use state-of-the-art diagnostic tools to identify the cause of indigestion and develop an effective treatment plan. Tests may include:

- **Upper GI endoscopy:** A flexible tube with a camera is passed into your oesophagus and stomach to check for inflammation, ulcers, or other abnormalities
- **Helicobacter pylori (H. pylori) testing:** This may involve a breath, blood, stool, or biopsy test to detect the bacteria
- **Imaging tests:** Ultrasound or X-rays may be used to identify issues with your gallbladder or other organs
- **Oesophageal pH monitoring:** Measures acid levels in your oesophagus to assess for reflux

How can you manage and treat indigestion?

For mild indigestion, lifestyle changes can make a big difference:

- **Eat smaller, more frequent meals:** Avoid large or heavy meals.
- **Limit trigger foods:** Reduce fatty, spicy, and acidic foods, as well as caffeine and alcohol.
- **Avoid lying down after eating:** Wait at least 2-3 hours before going to bed
- **Maintain a healthy weight:** Excess weight can put pressure on your stomach
- **Quit smoking:** Smoking irritates the digestive system and weakens the LOS

Over-the-counter antacids or acid-reducing medications can provide short-term relief. However, if your symptoms persist, worsen, or are linked to an underlying condition, your doctor may recommend:

- **Proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) or H2 blockers:** These medications reduce stomach acid production.
- **Antibiotics:** If H. pylori infection is detected.
- **Surgery:** Rarely, surgery may be needed for severe cases, such as to repair a hiatus hernia.

Why choose Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic?

At Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic, we specialise in diagnosing and treating indigestion and related conditions. Our experienced team uses advanced diagnostic tools and personalised treatment plans to address your symptoms effectively. Whether you need a simple test or ongoing management, we are committed to providing high-quality care in a supportive and professional environment.

Contact us

If you're experiencing persistent or severe indigestion, contact Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic today to book a consultation. Early diagnosis and treatment can help you find relief and protect your digestive health.