



# HEALTH AWARENESS

## When Is Simple Heartburn Not So Simple?

(NAPSA)—Most of us have felt it—burning pain that starts behind the lower breastbone and may even radiate up toward the neck. Heartburn is very common. In fact, two out of five people experience heartburn or acid regurgitation at least once a month. With so many people reaching for antacids, it's no surprise that heartburn is often thought of as an uncomfortable but normal part of life.

While an occasional episode of heartburn is usually nothing to worry about, frequent or persistent heartburn can be a sign of a more serious problem. Heartburn is the most common symptom of a condition called gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD). In people with GERD, stomach acid repeatedly flows back (refluxes) into the food pipe, known as the esophagus. This frequent exposure to acidic stomach contents can irritate the lining of the esophagus. If left untreated, it can lead to serious complications.

"It is unfortunate that many people with chronic heartburn have no idea that it might indicate a serious disorder," says Nancy Norton, president of the International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders (IFFGD). "Many develop complications that could have been prevented with proper treatment."

### Know When It's Time to See a Doctor

If you have heartburn that occurs more than once a week, becomes more severe or occurs at night and wakes you from sleep, it may be a sign of a more serious condition, and you should consider talking with a physician. Even

### When Should You Talk With a Doctor?

Talk with your doctor if:

- Your heartburn occurs two or more times a week
- Your heartburn persists or becomes more severe
- Your heartburn occurs at night and wakes you from sleep
- You have had heartburn or reflux for five years or more
- You have difficulty or pain when swallowing
- Your discomfort or pain interferes with your daily activities.

These symptoms may indicate a condition more serious than simple heartburn. 

occasional heartburn—if it has occurred for a period of five years or more or is associated with difficulty in swallowing—may indicate a problem.

People with long-standing, chronic heartburn are at greater risk for complications including erosive esophagitis (inflammation or ulcers in the esophagus), stricture (a narrowing of the esophagus caused by scarring) or a potentially precancerous disease that involves a cellular change in the esophagus called Barrett's esophagus. The good news is that complications can usually be prevented with proper treatment.

### To Learn More

For more information about heartburn, visit [www.aboutgerd.org](http://www.aboutgerd.org) or call the toll-free IFFGD heartburn helpline at (888) 964-2001.

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*Note to Editors: While November 18-24, 2007 is GERD Awareness Week, this story can be run at any time.*