In heartburn when stomach acids flow backward, up into your esophagus, it may come up as a regurgitated meal, or it may come up like a frothy foam from your mouth. Sometimes, partially digested foods flow all the way to the back of your throat. This backward flow is called reflux.

If you have heartburn several times a week, you may not feel well enough to suffer in silence. Don’t hesitate to ask your primary care provider about heartburn and the lifestyle changes and prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) medications that can provide relief. He or she can be your partner in treatment.

Is it Heartburn?

• After or after eating certain foods—do you sometimes feel a warm or pain in your breastbone? [Yes] [No]

• Do you sometimes have an acid taste in the back of your throat? [Yes] [No]

• Do you feel that food is coming back into your mouth? [Yes] [No]

• Have you lived, especially after a large meal, do you get these feelings? [Yes] [No]

• Do these feelings go away when you take antacids or OTC acid blockers? [Yes] [No]

If you can answer yes to any of these five questions, then you have heartburn—but read on.

Is it More Than Heartburn?

• Has it lasted for several months? [Yes] [No]

• Do you have heartburn two or more times each week? [Yes] [No]

• Has it lasted for several months? [Yes] [No]

• Do you regularly take medications for it—and it still comes back? [Yes] [No]

If you can answer yes to any of these last four questions, you may have a more serious problem. Talk to your primary health care provider.

Three Myths About Heartburn

Myth #1: Heartburn is no big deal.

Fact: Heartburn pain can severely limit what you do and how well you can do it. Your health care provider or pharmacist can help you treat it.

Myth #2: My heartburn is my own fault.

Fact: You didn’t cause your heartburn, but you can take a number of steps to prevent and control it. For advice from the American Pharmacists Association (Pharmacist Answers), visit www.PrilosecOTC.com.

Myth #3: Heartburn is not a serious medical problem.

Fact: Heartburn can progress to cause more serious problems including:

• Inflammation and ulcers in your esophagus.

• A change in the cells of the esophagus lining.

• Stomach ulcers.

• Changes and prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) medications that can provide relief.

Do you get heartburn just once in a while? Try an OTC medication.

You may need a prescription medication. For prescription PPIs (including Prilosec OTC), when taken as directed for 14 days, it provides 24-hour relief of frequent heartburn symptoms. If symptoms persist longer than 14 days, you should see your health care provider.

You may need more help than OTC heartburn medicines can provide. You may need a prescription medication. For prescription PPIs (including Prilosec, Prevacid, Advair, Protonix, and Nexium), you will need to contact your health care provider. Prescription PPIs block your stomach’s production of nearly all acid, leaving just enough for normal digestion of food. Another type of prescription PPIs block acid in stages. Once you have used a prescription PPI, you may need to take a prescription H2 blocker if you don’t get the relief you want.

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When to Ask for Help

You may hesitate to contact your primary health care provider about heartburn. If you are afraid of having a negative response or of hearing that your heart care provider can offer several treatment options, your pharmacist can help you decide whether further medical help for your heartburn is necessary.