

Indigestion, Acid Reflux, Heartburn - What Your Doctor Will Do

If your indigestion does not clear up after two weeks with simple home treatment, it is sensible to ask your doctor's advice without further delay. He or she will start off by asking a lot of questions about the exact symptoms you have been experiencing, how long they have been troubling you, what brings them on, what relieves them, and so on. This will usually be followed by a physical examination to identify any tender places in your abdomen and to check on your general health. Your GP may be confident that he or she can deal with your problem straight away, or you may be referred to a hospital clinic for further tests. In fact, most people with indigestion do not need further tests. Your GP will usually be able to make an accurate diagnosis based entirely on your symptoms and then offer advice or treatment. If the symptoms suggest gastro-oesophageal reflux then advice about lifestyle with or without antacids will usually be all that you need. There are, however, three scenarios in which your doctor may feel that further investigation is warranted.

A suspected peptic ulcer Although your doctor may well be able to make a diagnosis based on your symptoms, this is not always the case. Some people who have 'typical' symptoms of a peptic ulcer turn out to have non-ulcer dyspepsia, and the treatment of the two conditions is entirely different. For this reason, if your doctor suspects a peptic ulcer then further tests are likely to be required. The most common test arranged is an endoscopy but your doctor might think that a test for infection with *Helicobacter pylori* is all that is required. Failure to respond If you are one of the minority of people whose symptoms continue to be troublesome despite treatment, your doctor may arrange for you to have an endoscopy to make sure that you do not have some other condition that needs to be treated in a different way.

Sinister symptoms This term is used to describe symptoms that almost always indicate significant underlying disease and warrant further investigation. The most important are indigestion associated with loss of appetite and weight and difficulty swallowing. These symptoms always need urgent medical advice. Further investigations are also usually needed if your symptoms are of recent origin and you are over 40, unless the explanation is very obvious and straightforward. Stomach cancer is almost unheard of in those under 40 years of age, but it is always a possibility in people over this age who experience indigestion for the first time. Early diagnosis is essential if treatment is to be effective.

About the Author

Healing philosophies, approaches, and therapies used in addition to, or instead of, conventional.

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