Nearly everyone has heartburn occasionally. It can be a temporary condition, or one that becomes chronic. Although it can be treated easily with changes in diet, lifestyle and over-the-counter medications, it can also be a symptom of more serious problems.

When you eat, the sphincter muscle at the lower end of your esophagus relaxes and opens to admit food to your stomach. The muscle then closes to prevent stomach acid from washing back up the esophagus.

Heartburn -- usually a painful, burning sensation in the chest after a heavy meal, or while bending over, lying on your back or lifting -- occurs when the sphincter doesn't close completely. Acid and bile from the stomach come back up through the esophagus, causing a burning sensation.

Other symptoms include pain or discomfort in the upper abdomen, nausea after eating, chronic cough, chronic sore throat, persistent hiccups, sensation of having lump in the throat, trouble swallowing and chronic nausea and vomiting. Pregnant women often experience heartburn as the growing fetus presses against the stomach.

Heartburn that won't go away needs medical attention because it may be a symptom of gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), pill or medication induced esophagitis, Barrett's esophagus, cancer of the esophagus, ulcers or other gastrointestinal problems. Chest pain, for instance, can be a symptom of GERD, esophageal spasm, angina and heart attack. Pain from any of these can occur following a heavy meal. So, if you suffer severe or chronic heartburn or chest pain, it's vital you find out if your problem is digestive or cardiac.

In men, it's fairly easy to tell the difference between a heart attack and heartburn: The symptoms of a heart attack include crushing chest pain. But in women, the symptoms of a heart attack include heartburn, as well as vomiting and nausea. If you are a woman, particularly one who is postmenopausal, and you have heartburn, don't wait to seek medical help.
You can do many things to reduce or relieve heartburn symptoms. The self-care steps below will help reduce acid levels in your stomach, reduce pressure on your stomach and esophagus, and neutralize the effects of acid.

Self-care steps for heartburn

Avoid foods and beverages that aggravate the problem. The most common irritants are caffeinated beverages, alcohol, whole-milk dairy products, fried and high-fat foods, chocolate, nuts, tomato products and citrus juices.

Over-the-counter (OTC) medications are available that are very effective in treating heartburn and GERD:

- Antacids. These often provide quick but short-lived relief. Antacids are available as calcium (for example, Tums), sodium, magnesium (for example, Milk of Magnesia) and aluminum compounds (for example Amphogel). Maalox and Mylanta contain both aluminum and magnesium which balances the side effects of diarrhea and constipation. Antacids that are high in sodium should be avoided by people with high blood pressure and heart disease. A common side effect of magnesium compounds is diarrhea. Constipation is a common side effect of calcium and aluminum compounds. Antacids can prevent the absorption of other medications, or they can increase the potency of other drugs. To avoid these interactions, take the other drugs an hour before or 3 hours after taking an antacid. Sodium bicarbonate may provide quick relief but, because of its high sodium content, isn't suitable for repeated use.

- Histamine (H2) receptor blockers. These medications decreases the production of stomach acid. H2 blockers are available as famotidine (Pepsid), cimetidine (Tagamet), ranitidine (Zantac) or under various other trade names. These drugs can interact with other drugs, make sure your health care provider knows if you are taking these drugs.

- Proton pump inhibitors. This group of drugs stops the production of acid in the stomach. They are very potent. Currently only one medication is available OTC, omeprazole (Prilosec OTC).

Because these medications may mask the symptoms of serious disease it is extremely important that you first know you do not have a serious problem. Before using OTC H2 blockers or Proton pump inhibitors you should consult your doctor if you have had trouble swallowing, heartburn for more than 3 months, chest pain, wheezing (with a history of heartburn), stomach pain, nausea or vomiting, blood in your stool or unexplained weight loss. When taking these meds, if you are not symptom-free after 14 days you should see your health care provider.

Try these additional self-care steps:

- Avoid eating within four hours of bedtime and drinking within two hours of bedtime.
- Don't wear tight-fitting clothes.
- Don't smoke.
- Don't overeat. Try eating smaller, more frequent meals.
- Make mealtimes relaxed. Eat slowly and chew thoroughly.
- Lose weight if you're overweight to reduce the pressure on the esophagus.
- Loosen or remove tight-fitting clothing when you eat.
- Don't lie down immediately after eating.
- Sleep with the head of your bed elevated. (Put the legs at the head of the bed on four- to six-inch blocks, or slip a wedge support under the mattress.)
- Avoid aspirin, ibuprofen and other arthritis medications, except acetaminophen.
- Avoid antacids that contain aluminum if you are a dialysis patient.
- Drink lukewarm -- not cold -- water with your meals.

At the doctor's

If you can't control your symptoms, see your doctor, who can determine if stomach acid is the problem. If it is, your doctor may prescribe an eight-week trial period of dietary restrictions, plus medication.

See your doctor for further information.
Pork Chops with Savory Apples

Ingredients:

- 2 medium apples
- 1 medium onion
- 1 large clove garlic
- 4 pork chops, about 3/4 inch thick, with bone (about 1-1/2 pounds total)
- 1 tsp. olive oil
- 1/4 cup water
- 1/4 cup fat-free sour cream

Directions:
Quarter and core apples. Peel if desired. Cut onion in half and then slice it. Use a large frying pan with a lid. Heat oil over medium-high heat; add chops and garlic. Brown quickly, about two minutes per side. Add cut-up apples, onion and water. Cover and turn heat to low. Let cook for about 15 minutes, until pork is cooked through and apples are soft. Remove chops to a warm serving platter. Bring pan juices to a boil and turn off heat. Stir in sour cream and pour over chops. Serve immediately.

Serves four

Each contains about 271 calories, 24 g protein, 13 g fat, 71 mg cholesterol, 13 g carbohydrates, 1 g fiber, and 75 mg sodium.

Submitted by: This week’s recipe came from our Employee Assistance Program website. Go to www.theeap.com to find more healthy tips.

Submit your healthy recipes to jrogers@tylertexas.com
Chinese food has long been associated with high sodium menu items and MSG leading many to avoid Chinese restaurants altogether or go in search of ways to limit sodium. While many Asian restaurants are now eliminating MSG completely from their recipes and working with nutrition professionals to decrease the sodium levels of their meals, there are still ways food-lovers can limit sodium in their meals.

Look at the nutrition facts information, if available, to make the best choice for your health goals. Many meals we assume are “healthy” or “low-sodium” can actually be just the opposite.

1. Request sauce on the side. Most of the sodium in Chinese food and other cuisines is in the condiments, so requesting sauce on the side will allow you to use just a small amount to limit sodium.

2. Go easy on the soy sauce (even the reduced sodium soy sauce). A little goes a long way both for flavor and added sodium.

3. Search Healthy Dining Finder.com for Sodium Savvy menu choices. These dietitian-recommended choices feature entrées that contain no more than 750 mg sodium and side dishes, appetizers and desserts with no more than 250 mg sodium.

These tips will help you limit sodium at Chinese restaurants, other Asian restaurants and more! Find nutrition information including calories, fat and sodium as well as Sodium Savvy menu choices like these on HealthyDiningFinder.com.

Genghis Grill-The Mongolian Stir Fry is a build your own bowl, fast casual, Asian stir-fry concept. It's actually not a cuisine but an interactive style of exhibition cooking modeled after a centuries-old legend. According to this legend, 12th century Mongol warriors, led by the mighty warrior Genghis Khan, heated their shields over open fires to grill food in the fields of battle!

Genghis Grill offers 8 healthy dining options on their menu. With 3 Sodium Savvy choices.

Remember to request no oil when ordering to obtain the best nutritional values.
THE TRICEPS PUSH BACK

Standing with arms by your sides and palms facing behind, pulse the arms backward for 5 seconds. Release and repeat for 12-15 reps. For best results, make sure to keep the arms long and straight! Take it up a notch by adding weights.

Do you have a question about the City of Tyler benefits? Would you like to submit a health related article for the newsletter? Maybe you have a healthy recipe you would like to share. Please submit your ideas and/or questions to jrogers@tylertexas.com.

FIT TO A “T” EVENT SCHEDULE

Every Tuesday  
Heartfulness Meditation Class, Taylor Auditorium  
5:30 p.m.

Sept. 7  
I can Cope Cancer Survivorship, UT Health Northeast  
12–1 p.m.

Sept. 10 & 11  
Rose City Triathlon — Lake Tyler  
8 a.m.

TYLER PARKS AND RECREATION

On-Going Classes and Programs:

American Karate Classes: Glass Recreation Center, Tues., 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. (beginner)

Clogging Classes: Tyler Senior Center, Tues., 11:30 to 12:30 p.m.

50 Plus Pickle Ball: Glass Recreation Center, Tues. and Thurs., 9 to 1 p.m.

Line Dance Classes: Tyler Senior Center, Tues. and Thurs., 12:30 to 2:30 p.m.

Step Aerobics: Glass Recreation Center, Mon. and Thurs., 6:30 to 7:30 p.m.

Zumba Classes: Glass Recreation Center, Mon. 6 to 7 p.m., Wed. 6 to 7 p.m. and Sat. 9 to 10 a.m.

For other classes and fun activities, please visit the City of Tyler’s website: http://parksandrec.cityoftyler.org/Home.aspx