

# DR JUSTIN TUCKER

OBSTETRICS | FERTILITY

## HEARTBURN AND REFLUX DURING PREGNANCY

*Heartburn is a VERY common and annoying symptom of pregnancy. It can be due to the hormonal changes in pregnancy as well as the enlarging uterus pushing up on the stomach.*

*Below are some useful tips we have put together to help relieve the burn and the good news is that they are usually quite effective. The information provided is partially based on a similar information sheet produced by MotherSafe and The Royal Hospital for Women, whom we thank.*

*If at any point you feel like you're getting considerably worse and the options below are not giving you relief, please let us know and we can workshop the next steps in getting you the care you need.*

Warmest,



### What Is Heartburn?

Heartburn is a common medical condition characterised by burning chest pain, sometimes a funny taste in the mouth and occasional regurgitation of food

### What Causes Heartburn?

Normally food moves downwards in the digestive tract from the mouth through the oesophagus to the stomach. Heartburn occurs when the contents of the stomach regurgitates back up into the oesophagus and occasionally all the way to the mouth. This is also known as gastro-oesophageal reflux disease or GORD and occurs when the muscle at the lower end of the oesophagus is not constricting as tightly as it should. In pregnancy, this occurs more frequently due to the effect of pregnancy hormones on both this muscle and the stomach itself. Later in pregnancy, this can be made worse by the physical pressure of the baby on the stomach forcing the stomach contents back into the oesophagus.

### Let's Treat Your Heartburn!

It is important that we treat your heartburn as we want you to feel well and be able to eat well and be healthy! We would like you to let us know if you have any of the following symptoms, as it may mean we need to investigate things further:

- Vomiting blood
- Pain or difficulty swallowing



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*Now, let's get on to making you feel better!*

## Non-medical treatment

If you are otherwise well, it is reasonable to try some diet and lifestyle measures aimed at reducing your reflux, before we consider using medication. These include:

- Raising head of bed.
- Avoiding eating 2 to 3 hours before bedtime or before vigorous exercise.
- Sitting upright when eating and not lying flat soon afterwards.
- Eating frequent, smaller meals rather than one large meal.
- Drinking fluids between, rather than with meals.
- Avoiding spicy and highly fatty foods, cigarettes, chocolate, alcohol, caffeine and citrus juices.

## Medical treatment of heartburn

If your heartburn is not controlled by lifestyle measures, it is very reasonable that we use some safe medications to manage symptoms. Most of the medications recommended to treat heartburn are available over the counter in a pharmacy meaning you do NOT need a script. All of the medications we recommend to you are very safe in pregnancy despite what is written on the packaging. If you would like further confirmation of this, you can ring the MotherSafe service on (02) 9382 6539.

- Antacids: These are the most appropriate medications to try as first line treatment. There are many different products available such as Mylanta or Gaviscon and come in either tablet or liquid form, and they are all safe to use in pregnancy at the recommended dosage.
- Histamine antagonists: Rantidine has recently been taken off the shelf but its replacement, Nizatidine, is available and safe in pregnancy. We recommend taking 150mg daily.
- Proton Pump Inhibitors: If your reflux isn't adequately responding to the above, then we can include a proton pump inhibitor. Common names for these are omeprazole, esomeprazole, lansoprazole, rabeprazole and pantoprazole. A short course for initial treatment is available over the counter from a pharmacy. If you are finding them useful, then we can give you a script for longer term use.

## Reflux and Breastfeeding

Antacids, histamine antagonists and proton pump inhibitors when taken correctly at recommended doses have all been found to be safe while breastfeeding and are actually given to babies who have reflux!

