

Here are this week's healthcare news highlights from AskaPatient:

- CDC says to avoid the temptation of eating raw dough, but it isn't necessarily because of the eggs. <http://ow.ly/zPb230mV6Ga> (12-10-18)
- England's government orders NHS to phase out the use of its thousands of fax machines and use newer communication technologies. <http://ow.ly/glOr30mV6N7> (12-10-18)
- Newly identified neurons help us learn from our mistakes and are implicated in obsessive-compulsive disorder. <http://ow.ly/BkHZ30mV6R4> (12-10-18)
- Benefits of taking statins far outweigh any side effects they may cause, American Heart Association says. <http://ow.ly/nsDw30mW8GM> (12-11-18)
- Many diabetics test their blood sugar too often, which adds up to millions of dollars in unnecessary spending. <http://ow.ly/bMmm30mW8In> (12-11-18)
- Though childbirth is associated with a lower risk of breast cancer, the risk seems to temporarily increase for a few years afterwards. <http://ow.ly/mzHU30mW8Jb> (12-11-18)
- Executives at a Johns Hopkins hospital in Florida resign following report that mortality rates for heart surgeries tripled. <http://ow.ly/O6IN30mX4gD> (12-12-18)
- What began as a lawsuit over 2 drugs has exploded into an investigation of 300, involving 16 companies colluding with one another. <http://ow.ly/3lIO30mX4zi> (12-12-18) (also see [related article](#) on our web site)
- Sprayable gel could help reduce recurrence of tumors that commonly return following surgery. <http://ow.ly/AIOj30mX4HG> (12-12-18)
- Lower limb amputations in younger diabetics is on the rise after a two-decade decline. <http://ow.ly/MOJ630mXTQA> (12-13-18)
- London study finds that people who use the subway system for commuting are more likely to get an airborne infection. <http://ow.ly/wIPZ30mXTYH> (12-13-18)
- Simpler test can predict metastasis in prostate cancer patients faster and at a fraction of the cost of current tests. <http://ow.ly/Tvwm30mXUj3> (12-13-18)
- New mobile technology can accurately predict autism in children, cutting down on the often lengthy wait times for clinics. <http://ow.ly/6zHR30mXUkM> (12-14-18)
- Outpatient doctor visits near \$500 on average in the U.S. which also exceeds all other countries in healthcare costs. <http://ow.ly/3XKK30mZKzy> (12-15-18)
- Exercising before bedtime has no negative effects on sleep and may slightly improve sleep quality. <http://ow.ly/iO3J30mZKAK> (12-15-18)
- J&J shares plummet after news that the company had known about asbestos in its Baby Powder for decades. <http://ow.ly/MdC030mZKBI> (12-15-18)
- New adhesive technology loses its grip when exposed to certain light, meaning we could soon painlessly rip off a Band-Aid. <http://ow.ly/x5G830mZKBR> (12-15-18)

From AskaPatient: How to choose a heartburn treatment at the drug store

(this article has been updated from the version appearing in the July 2017 newsletter)

Heartburn is an uncomfortable digestive condition that most of us have experienced at one time or another. The feeling of burning below the breastbone or in the throat is symptomatic of stomach acid moving its way up through the esophagus. This can happen after a meal containing food like onions, caffeine, peppermint, chocolate, fried foods, sodas, and alcohol. Certain drugs, including aspirin, ibuprofen, and osteoporosis treatments can also irritate the esophagus and cause heartburn.

How can you avoid this condition? Most doctors would first tell you to avoid the foods and medicines that trigger your heartburn. There are also some items in your kitchen (like apple cider vinegar) that might bring relief for an upset stomach. But when it is late at night (and the offending meal has already been eaten), you might be seeking relief by looking at treatments inside your medicine cabinet or at the drug store. Since three distinct categories of heartburn medicines are now available over-the-counter, make sure you choose the right OTC medicine for you. The following categories of treatments are listed from mildest to strongest, in terms of side effects risk:

1. **Antacids** The safest of the OTC medications for heartburn. They have always been available without a prescription. These treatments neutralize excess acid in the stomach.
Examples: Tums, Maalox, Milk of Magnesia, [Gaviscon](#)
2. **Histamine2 Blockers (H2 blocker)** Available OTC since 1995. These drugs **partially block production** of stomach acid.
Generic names: famotidine, cimetidine, ranitidine
Brand name examples: [Zantac](#), [Pepcid](#), [Tagamet](#), [Axid](#)
3. **Proton Pump Inhibitor (PPI)** These drugs act by **blocking the secretion of stomach acid** and are used to treat **severe** cases of heartburn (or Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease –GERD). GERD has been defined as heartburn episodes that occur frequently or at least two times a week.
Generic names: omeprazole, esomeprazole, lansoprazole.
Brand name examples: [Prilosec](#) (OTC in 2003), [Nexium](#) (OTC in 2014), [Prevacid](#) (24 hour OTC version in 2009; Rx version still available), [Zegerid OTC](#)

While PPI drugs are very effective at reducing symptoms, **severe side effects can occur, especially with long-term use.** Sometimes after stopping the drug, heartburn symptoms increase, leading the patient to start taking it again. However, the exacerbated heartburn symptoms are sometimes actually “rebound symptoms” and not indicative that the patient really has GERD. The rebound symptoms often resolve with time, and those patients may successfully use occasional H2 blockers, antacids, and/or dietary changes to combat heartburn.

If no relief is gained from OTC treatments, a visit to the doctor is in order. The doctor may recommend prescription-only version of a PPI drug. Many of the prescription-only PPIs are for treating more serious cases of GERD or stomach ulcers and may be used in conjunction with other medicines to eliminate H. Pylori bacteria. Examples include [Aciphex](#) (rabeprazole) and [Dexilant](#) (dexlansoprazole), [Protonix](#) and [Pantoprazole Sodium](#).

Non-PPI drugs for treating active stomach ulcers that are to be taken short term (eight weeks or less) include [Carafate](#) (sucralfate).

Sources and More Reading:

Links above on drug names go to patient reviews

Medline Plus Drug Information, such as [omeprazole](#) (used in Prilosec and Zegerid)

Berkeley Wellness Letter: [Help for Heartburn and GERD](#)

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