

Heartburn, Gas, and Constipation

Hormonal imbalances during pregnancy may result in the softening of the smooth muscle found in the wall of the digestive tract. The consequent reduction in peristaltic movement causes food to pass more slowly through the esophagus, stomach, and small and large intestine to the rectum, inducing gas and constipation. Heartburn can be caused by the softening of the muscular valve between the esophagus and the stomach, so that partially digested, acidic food may leak back up into the esophagus, causing a burning sensation in the chest. Heartburn and constipation are generally experienced in the later stages of pregnancy.

Susan Weed and Rosemary Gladstar emphasize eating small meals more frequently, chewing food carefully, and avoiding acid-causing and greasy foods. Both recommend papaya (especially raw, but also in tablets and papaya leaf) for the enzymes, fennel and anise seeds; Gladstar adds cumin and dill seed, suggesting an old-fashioned remedy for digestive disturbances: combine these four seeds and chew them before and after meals. Be aware that coffee and cigarettes increase heartburn by irritating the stomach, and remember that whole grains, fresh fruits, and vegetables combined with nonstressful exercise are the best solutions to constipation.