



GERD – Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease

GERD – What does this mean? What is it?

GERD (or Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease) occurs when a small valve (the lower esophageal sphincter or LES) between the stomach and esophagus leaks, causing digestive fluids and stomach acid to “back up” from the stomach into the esophagus. This acid can irritate the esophagus, leading to symptoms. GERD can also damage the delicate lining on the inside of the esophagus, leading to more serious problems in some patients.

Frequent heartburn is the most common symptom of GERD and often occurs after meals. It is often described as an uncomfortable, rising, burning sensation behind the breastbone. Other major symptoms of GERD are: regurgitation of gastric acid or sour contents into the mouth; difficult and/or painful swallowing.

If you frequently experience heartburn or other symptoms, see your doctor.

What is the goal of treatment?

The goal of treatment is to reduce the amount of stomach acid “backing up” into the esophagus. Medical treatment may be necessary to relieve symptoms and heal any damage to the esophagus.

What steps can be taken to relieve GERD symptoms?

Follow all of your doctor’s directions and take any medications as directed. Listed below are some simple lifestyle changes that you may find helpful. Please consult with your doctor to see which of these is appropriate for you.

- (1) **Bed Blocks** - Elevate the head of your bed 2-6 inches with wood blocks or bricks. Using extra pillows is not a good substitute. Use of a foam wedge beneath the upper half of the body is an alternative.
- (2) **Avoid Foods if They Cause Symptoms** - Foods that may aggravate symptoms include: spicy and fatty foods, tomato and citrus juices (such as grapefruit and orange juices), chocolate, mints, coffee, tea, colas, and alcoholic beverages.
- (3) **Do Not Lie Down for 2 Hours After Eating** - Allow gravity to work. Also, avoid bending over at the waist to pick up things; instead bend at the knees.
- (4) **Stop Smoking** - If you cannot stop, decreasing the number of cigarettes you smoke may help.
- (5) **Limit Coffee** - Limit coffee to 2-3 cups per day. Limiting consumption of other caffeine-containing beverages (tea, soft drinks) may also be helpful.
- (6) **Avoid Tight Clothing** - Tight belts, tight pants or girdles can increase the pressure on the abdomen.
- (7) **Antacids** - Antacids can be taken at bedtime and 30-60 minutes after each meal or as directed by your physician.
- (8) **Eat Smaller Meals** - Don’t overfill your stomach.
- (9) **Lose Weight** - Excess weight increases the amount of pressure constantly placed on your stomach. Even small amounts of weight loss may help.