

## **Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)**

When you swallow, food goes from your throat, down your esophagus, through the lower esophageal sphincter (LES), and into your stomach. When the LES does not close properly, the stomach contents leak back, or reflux, into the esophagus.

This backflow of acid from the stomach can irritate and sometimes damage the lining of the inside of the esophagus, causing an uncomfortable burning sensation, commonly called heartburn. Occasional heartburn is common, but if heartburn occurs more than two times per week, it is possibly gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD).

### **Symptoms of GERD**

- Heartburn
- Regurgitation of stomach acid into the mouth
- Difficulty and/or pain when swallowing
- Chest pain
- Excessive clearing of the throat
- The feeling that food is stuck in your throat
- Burning sensation in the mouth

### **Factors that may contribute to GERD**

- Pregnancy
- Overweight
- Alcohol use
- Smoking
- Medications that delay emptying of the stomach or that increase the backup of acid into the esophagus

### **Diet and GERD**

Removing some foods from the diet might help improve GERD, but it is important to know that individual reactions to foods vary. Other individuals who have GERD may not tolerate the same foods that you can tolerate, so rather than eliminating all suggested foods (see the following list), try limiting them one by one to see if your GERD improves. Avoiding entire groups of foods sometimes is not necessary and may result in nutritional deficiencies.

Foods that may have an association with reflux events include:

- Citrus fruits:
  - Oranges

- Grapefruit
- Lemons
- Limes
  
- Spicy foods
- Chocolate
- Caffeinated beverages:
  - Tea
  - Coffee
  - Cola
  
- High-fat foods:
  - Oil
  - Butter
  
- Desserts
- Fried foods
- Raw garlic
- Raw onions
- Mint flavorings:
  - Peppermint oil
  - Spearmint oil
  
- Tomato-based foods:
  - Spaghetti sauce
  - Pizza
  - Chili

### **Lifestyle changes that may help manage GERD**

- Raise the head of your bed by 6"–8" by placing blocks of wood under the bedposts, instead of using extra pillows
- Eat a low-fat diet
- Avoid alcohol
- Stop smoking, if you smoke
- Maintain a healthy body weight—lose weight if necessary
- Eat smaller meals
- Wear loose-fitting clothing
- Drink liquids between meals, instead of with meals
- Avoid lying down, bending over, or straining after eating

- Do not lie down for at least 3 hours after a meal
- Chew gum after meals to help neutralize stomach acid

### **Other tips**

- Work with a registered dietitian to develop an eating plan that is right for you
- Check out other sources of information, including the:
  - American Gastroenterological Association (AGA): [www.gastro.org](http://www.gastro.org)
  - American College of Gastroenterology (ACG): <http://gi.org/>

### **References and recommended readings**

Cleveland Clinic. Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD).

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