

# HealthyActions

Achieving Your Goals for Healthy Living



## GERD

Many people have reflux once in a while. If you have reflux more than twice a week, you may have GERD, or acid reflux disease. GERD can lead to more serious health problems, but it is treatable. In this brochure we will talk about cause, symptoms, tests and treatment options.

GERD is short for gastroesophageal reflux (GA-stroh-eh-SAW-fuh-JEE-ul REE-fluks) disease. The stomach acid that backs up can damage your esophagus. It can cause bleeding or ulcers. You should see a doctor if you have symptoms of GERD.<sup>1</sup>

Your stomach acid is used to help break down the food that you eat. Your stomach is built to handle the acid. But your esophagus, which is the tube that goes from your mouth to your stomach, can not handle the acid. So when the acid backs up into your esophagus it causes a burning sensation called “heartburn”: this is called “reflux” (REE-luks).<sup>1</sup>

### Symptoms of GERD

The main symptom of GERD is “heartburn,” which is when you<sup>2</sup>:

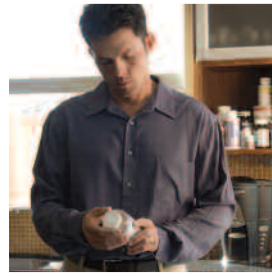
- Feel pain or burning in the lower part of your chest
- Feel pain or burning behind your breast bone
- Feel pain or burning in the middle of your belly

Other symptoms of GERD include<sup>1</sup>:

- Burning in your throat
- Tasting stomach fluid in the back of your mouth
- Trouble swallowing

### What Triggers Acid Reflux or GERD?

- Certain foods or drinks examples: fried foods, citric fruits like oranges, tomato sauce and caffeine
- Laying down in less than 3 hours after eating
- Being overweight
- Being pregnant
- Smoking
- Eating too much



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## Diagnosing GERD

Talk to your doctor about your symptoms. Your doctor may want to order additional tests depending on how severe your symptoms are. The types of test that might be used are:

### Endoscopy

Looking at the surface of the esophagus using a lighted, flexible instrument called an endoscope

### Barium Esophagram

A special X-ray that uses barium to outline the esophagus

### Esophageal pH monitoring test

A test that measures how often and for how long stomach acid enters the esophagus

## How is GERD Treated?

If you are diagnosed with GERD your doctor may give you medicine to treat your condition. You can also take an active role in treating GERD by making the following lifestyle changes:

- Stop smoking
- Avoid food and drinks that make your symptoms worse
- Lose weight if you are overweight
- Eat smaller meals
- Wear loose-fitting clothes
- Avoid lying down for 3 hours after you've eaten
- Raise the head of your bed up 6 to 8 inches

## What Else Can You Do?

- Follow your treatment plan as prescribed by your doctor – take your medicine the way your doctor tells you to
- Make the lifestyle changes such as avoiding foods that trigger GERD

## Schedule a Follow-up Visit With Your Doctor.

- In the meantime, keep a diary of your symptoms and bring them with you to the next visit

## References

1. NDDIC. Digestive Diseases Dictionary. <http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/ddiseases/pubs/dictionary/>
2. NDDIC. Heartburn, Gastroesophageal Reflux (GER), and Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD). <http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/ddiseases/pubs/gerd/>