

What is GERD?

Gastroesophageal reflux disease or GERD occurs when the esophagus becomes damaged by acid from the stomach.



WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE?

In most people GERD feels like heartburn that happens multiple times during the week or everyday. You may feel burning or discomfort in your stomach or mid-chest. In some people, GERD can cause an acidic or bitter taste in the back of your throat or mouth. You may feel like some of your stomach contents are traveling from the stomach back to the mouth. Some people have a cough or have trouble breathing, a hard time swallowing or pain when swallowing or chest pain; if you have any of these symptoms, please contact your health professional. Also call your health professional if you have the following: vomiting blood, weight loss, choking or damage to your teeth.

WHAT CAUSES IT?

GERD happens when acidic contents from your stomach move upward and cause damage to the lining of your esophagus. This can sometimes happen because some of the valves in the stomach aren't working right, your stomach contents are too acidic or the protective coating of your esophagus isn't working right.

HOW CAN I GET BETTER?

LIFESTYLE CHANGES

Diet Changes. Simple changes to your diet can make a big difference. Try eating smaller meals to allow your stomach time to empty properly. Eat foods low in fat and higher in protein. Avoid foods that may irritate or increase stomach acids. Example of foods and drinks that can make GERD worse are:

- Spicy foods or chilies
- Garlic and onions
- Chocolate
- Orange juice or citrus fruits
- Alcohol
- Coffee
- Soda



One way to find out which foods are causing problems is through the elimination diet. This diet involves removing many different types of food and slowly adding them back. By doing this you can find out which foods are causing the problem.

Avoid Certain Medicine. Some medicine can make GERD worse. If possible try to avoid nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs like aspirin, ibuprofen and naproxen. Many other medicines can make GERD worse, talk to your health professional or pharmacist if you have concerns.

Elevate Head of Bed. Elevating the head of your bed will help keep your stomach contents from traveling up to your esophagus. Try not to lie down until two to three hours after eating. This allows time for your stomach to empty.

Quit Smoking. Smoking can make GERD worse. If you are thinking about quitting talk to your health professional about things that can make you successful.



Reduce or Avoid Alcohol. Alcohol increases the amount of acid in your stomach. Alcoholism can be a common cause of GERD or can make it worse.

Manage Your Stress. Stress may play a role in GERD. Make time to do things that you enjoy. Exercising, deep breathing, meditation and journaling may also help reduce stress. Some studies even show that regular meditation can lower acid production in the stomach.

HERBAL MEDICINES AND SUPPLEMENTS

Some herbal products may help with the symptoms of GERD. These include ginger, licorice (use the DGL type which will not increase blood pressure), chamomile, slippery elm and marshmallow herb. Some of these natural products can interact with other medicines. Talk to your clinician to see if any of these may work for you.

INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE THERAPIES

Acupuncture or Acupressure. This is a traditional Chinese treatment that has been effective for GERD and many other illnesses. Acupuncture uses thin needles in the skin, while acupressure involves a trained practitioner using their hands to place pressure on specific points on your skin. While it may cause some discomfort, it generally is not painful.

For more information, scan the QR code below, or visit nciph.org/gerd



