

Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease and Anti-Reflux Diet

Gastroesophageal reflux disease, or GERD, occurs when the **lower esophageal sphincter** (LES) does not close properly, and stomach contents splash back, or reflux, into the esophagus. The LES is a ring of muscle at the bottom of the esophagus that acts like a camera shutter between the esophagus and stomach. The esophagus carries food from the mouth to the stomach.

When refluxed stomach acid touches the lining of the esophagus, it causes a burning sensation in the chest or throat called **heartburn**. The fluid may even be tasted in the back of the mouth, and this is called **acid indigestion**. Occasional heartburn is common but does not necessarily mean one has GERD. Heartburn that occurs more than twice a week may be considered GERD, which can eventually lead to more serious health problems.

What Are the Symptoms of GERD?

The main symptoms are **persistent heartburn** and **acid regurgitation**. Some people have GERD without heartburn. Instead, they experience pain in the chest, hoarseness in the morning, or trouble swallowing. You may feel like you have food stuck in your throat or like you are choking or your throat is tight. GERD can also cause a dry cough and bad breath.

Factors that may contribute to GERD include:

- alcohol use
- overweight
- pregnancy
- smoking

Patients experiencing reflux should **avoid the following foods** since these may increase the chance of reflux:

- citrus fruits
- chocolate
- drinks with caffeine (coffee, tea, cola)
- fatty and fried foods
- garlic and onions
- alcohol
- fried foods
- cream sauces
- high-fat meats
- mint flavorings – peppermint, spearmint
- spicy foods
- tomato-based foods, like spaghetti sauce, chili, and pizza
- pastries
- butter and margarine
- oil and salad dressings

Lifestyle Changes may also help reflux symptoms:

- If you smoke, stop
- Do not drink alcohol
- Lose weight if needed – follow a “low-calorie” diet
- Eat small meals – the evening meal should be the smallest, with nothing to eat after, to avoid reflux while sleeping.
- Avoid lying down for 3 hours after a meal.
- Wear loose-fitting clothes that do not restrict your waist.
- Patients’ individual tolerances must be considered – any food that causes heartburn should be avoided.
- Decaffeinated coffee or tea are permitted

