

GASTROESOPHAGEAL REFLUX DISEASE (GERD) and HEARTBURN

In GERD, acid from the stomach flows upwards into the esophagus, causing a burning or acidic sensation in your stomach or chest. An acidic taste may also occur in the back of your mouth or throat, which can be accompanied by nausea. It can last for several minutes or hours.

Other common symptoms include bloating and frequent belching. Less common symptoms of GERD include ongoing cough, persistent sore throat, hoarse voice, and/or the sensations of having too much saliva in your mouth or having a constant lump in the back of your throat. These symptoms often come and go, and tend to be worse after a meal.

About 1 in 3 adults experience occasional heartburn, and nearly 1 in 10 adults have heartburn at least once a day. In many cases, it's mild and soon resolves. However, it is quite common for symptoms to be frequent or severe enough to affect one's quality of life.

What can make it worse?

- Smoking, alcohol, spicy and/or greasy foods, tomatoes, citrus, coffee, caffeine, chocolate, garlic, onions, and peppermint (if your symptoms are worse after eating a certain food, you may want to stop eating that food to see if your symptoms get better)
- Stress
- Over-eating and/or eating and drinking right before going to sleep; lying flat or bending over
- Obesity

What can make it better?

- Avoid foods and medications that aggravate your symptoms
- Eat small meals at regular intervals; lose weight if you need to
- Decrease or stop smoking
- Decrease or avoid caffeine; avoid alcohol
- Avoid wearing clothing that is tight around the waist
- Avoid lying down immediately after eating/drinking
- Avoid eating or drinking within 2-3 hours before going to sleep
- If you have heartburn at night, elevate the head of your bed about 4-8 inches
- Try using medications that may be recommended by your clinician, such as antacids (Maalox®, Mylanta®, Tums®, etc.), acid blockers (Tagamet HB®, Pepcid®, Zantac®, etc.), or proton pump inhibitors (Prilosec®)

Check with your health care provider if you have:

- Abdominal pain not relieved by an antacid or other prescribed medications
- Stool that is black (like tar), or bloody
- Recurrent vomiting, or blood in your vomit
- Difficulty swallowing
- Unexplained weight loss