

Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)

Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease occurs when the stomach acid flows backward into the esophagus, the food pipe that carries food to the stomach. Everyone occasionally experiences gastroesophageal reflux. Severe cases, however, can result in injury to the lower esophagus and require treatment. The usual symptom is heartburn, an uncomfortable burning sensation behind the breastbone.

How do people get GERD?

GERD is caused by reflux of the stomach acid into the esophagus. In most patients this is due to relaxation of the sphincter or muscle that keeps the lower end of the esophagus closed when a person is not swallowing food or liquids. Some factors can weaken this muscle and cause reflux.

Treating Reflux.

Dietary and lifestyle choices may contribute to GERD. Some simple changes can decrease the amount of reflux or reduce damage to the lining of the esophagus from refluxed materials.

1. Maintain a healthy body weight. A modest 8 to 10 pound weight loss can significantly reduce reflux.
2. Eat a low fat diet. Reduce the high fat foods you eat such as fried foods, margarine or butter, mayonnaise, salad dressings, fast foods, chips, cookies, cheese, and ice cream.
3. Eat smaller, more frequent meals - every 3 to 4 hours.
4. Limit alcohol – beer, wine, alcoholic beverages.
5. Limit caffeine – including coffee, tea, iced tea, chocolate, and cola.
6. Limit spicy food. Spices, including peppermint, may increase reflux.
7. Avoid citrus fruits and juices, and tomato products if they cause heartburn.
8. Quit Smoking!
9. Do not lie down for 2 hours after eating and do not eat or drink anything for 3 to 4 hours before bedtime.
10. Avoid all medications that contain aspirin or the “non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs” such as Advil, Nuprin, Motrin, Naprosyn, Clinoril, Voltaren.
11. Avoid bending or exercise after meals.
12. Elevate the head of the bed 8 to 10 inches by placing pillows or a wedge under the upper part of the mattress. In this way, gravity keeps stomach juices out of the esophagus.
13. Take all your medication as prescribed by your doctor. If symptoms are not improved in six weeks, call the office for a follow-up appointment as the medications may need to be changed.