

# GERD



## What Is Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease?

Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), sometimes called acid reflux, is a common problem. It happens when stomach acid flows back into the esophagus, a pipe that carries food from the mouth to the stomach. This can cause irritation. GERD is not usually dangerous, but can be uncomfortable. If not controlled, it can damage the inside of the esophagus. Risks for GERD include:

- Pregnancy
- Smoking
- Drinking alcohol
- Being overweight
- Eating certain foods (fatty or fried foods, chocolate, mint, garlic, onions, citrus fruits)
- Drinking certain drinks (juices, carbonated drinks like soda)
- Lying down after eating



## What Are the Warning Signs of GERD?

The most common symptoms of GERD are heartburn or regurgitation. Regurgitation is when liquid or food from the stomach moves from the esophagus into the mouth. Other symptoms may include:

- Chest pain
- Hoarseness
- Wheezing
- Trouble breathing



## How Is GERD Diagnosed?

- Your doctor will ask questions about your medical history and symptoms. You may be diagnosed with GERD based on your symptoms or by taking medicine to see if your symptoms improve.
- Your doctor may need to look inside of your esophagus. This is done by passing a long, thin tube called an endoscope through your mouth and stomach to learn more about your symptoms.



## How Is GERD Treated?

For many patients, lifestyle changes can help improve symptoms. These changes include:

- Avoiding foods or drinks that may cause GERD symptoms
- Not lying down for 3 hours after meals and raising your head during sleep
- Quitting smoking and avoiding alcohol

Other treatments for GERD include:

- Over-the-counter antacids
- Prescription medicines to lower stomach acid
- Surgery, which may be needed by some people when other treatments do not help

## GERD



### Questions for My Doctor

- What lifestyle changes should I make to prevent GERD?
- Will I have to change my diet?
- I use garlic and spices all the time in my cooking, will I have to stop?
- Is there a medicine that can treat my symptoms?
- Are there any side effects from treatment?
- What should I do if the medicine does not help?
- How can I tell whether my chest pain is from GERD or a heart problem?
- What happens if my GERD does not get better?



### Bottom Line

- GERD is caused when stomach acid washes up into the esophagus and causes irritation.
- Risk factors for GERD include pregnancy, smoking, drinking alcohol, being overweight, eating certain foods, and lying down after eating.
- Symptoms include heartburn or regurgitation. Some people may have chest pain, hoarseness, wheezing, and trouble breathing.
- Treatment includes changes to diet and other lifestyle changes. Some people may need medicines that lower stomach acid. When other treatments do not help, surgery may be needed.

### For More Information

- **MedlinePlus:** [www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/gerd.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/gerd.html)
- **American Academy of Family Physicians:** [www.aafp.org/afp/2003/1001/p1321.html](http://www.aafp.org/afp/2003/1001/p1321.html)

### Notes:

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---