

What to Eat When You Have Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)

Do you experience heartburn, pain in your esophagus or an unpleasant taste in your mouth? These may be symptoms of Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD). Read on to learn more about GERD and how to manage your symptoms.

What is Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)?

Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD) is a condition that occurs when the contents of the stomach flow back (or “refluxes”) into the esophagus. This reflux happens when the esophagus muscle that keeps food in the stomach relaxes or loosens over time.

What are the symptoms of GERD?

If you have GERD, you may experience:

Heartburn (this is the most common symptom of GERD)

An unpleasant or bitter taste in your mouth

Chronic dry cough

Hoarseness in the voice (usually in the morning) and feeling you have to clear your throat often

Tightness in your throat

Wheezing

If not treated, GERD can cause more severe symptoms, like difficult or painful swallowing, bleeding in the stomach and intestines, [anemia](#) (low iron) and unintentional weight loss due to a loss of appetite or avoiding food. GERD may also increase the risk of cancer of the esophagus.

What's the difference between heartburn and GERD?

Many people have heartburn once in a while. When heartburn becomes a chronic and frequent problem, your health care provider may tell you that you have GERD.

How can I manage my symptoms of GERD?

Diet and lifestyle changes can help manage symptoms of GERD. Try the tips below:

Avoid eating large meals

Eat slowly

Avoid eating right before bed (wait more than two hours before lying down after a meal)

Maintain a body weight that is right for you

Reduce or stop [smoking](#)

Elevate the head of your bed while sleeping

Experiment with avoiding foods that may trigger symptoms, including:

Higher fat foods like deep fried foods, high fat desserts and snacks, and high fat meat and dairy products

Acidic foods like citrus (lemon, lime, orange, grapefruit) and tomato products (sauce, soup and paste etc.)

Spices, especially chili, cayenne and black pepper

Peppermint

Chocolate

Garlic and onions

Carbonated beverages

Caffeinated beverages like coffee, tea, energy drinks and pop

Alcohol

What causes GERD or heartburn is different for each person. The research on specific food triggers that cause heartburn is limited. Try keeping track of what you eat and when, so you know what your triggers are. Consult a dietitian for help.

Your health care provider may also recommend antacids or other medications that help reduce stomach acid.

When should I see my health care provider about GERD?

Speak with your health care provider if:

You experience heartburn regularly (more than three times a week)

Your symptoms affect your daily activities, as well as sleep

Speak with your health care provider as soon as possible if you are experiencing:

Vomiting

Dark, tar-like stools or blood with a bowel movement, which may be a result of stomach and intestinal bleeding

Difficult or painful swallowing and/or

Unplanned weight loss

How can a dietitian help?

A [dietitian](#) can help identify foods and beverages that may be triggering your GERD symptoms. They will give you advice on substitutions to make sure you are still getting enough nutrients. Your dietitian will also give you advice on how to plan a balanced diet and what foods to eat to meet your goals. [Connect with a dietitian today!](#)

Bottom line

If you are diagnosed with GERD, your symptoms can usually be managed with changes to your lifestyle and eating habits. It is important to speak with your health care provider GERD is affecting your regular daily activities.

You may also be interested in:

[Diet Tips for Managing Your Heartburn or Acid Reflux](#)

[Irritable Bowel Syndrome](#)

[Top 5 Reasons to See a Dietitian](#)

This article was written and reviewed by dietitians from Dietitians of Canada. The advice in this article is intended as general information and should not replace advice given by your dietitian or healthcare provider.