

Managing 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 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 doctor 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 and eating quickly

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

Avoid high fat foods, fried foods and spicy foods

Avoid acidic foods like citrus (lemon, lime, orange, grapefruit) and tomatoes

Avoid chocolate, garlic and onions

Drink less alcohol and caffeinated drinks

Maintain a healthy body weight

Reduce or stop smoking

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

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:

[Managing your heartburn](#)

[Irritable Bowel Syndrome](#)