

# WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT GASTROESOPHAGEAL REFLUX DISEASE

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## What Is Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease?

Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), which is sometimes called acid reflux, is a common problem. It occurs when stomach acid washes up into the esophagus and causes irritation. The esophagus is the tube that carries food from the mouth to the stomach. GERD is not usually dangerous, but can be very uncomfortable.

If GERD is not controlled, it can damage the inside of the esophagus. In rare cases, GERD may make changes in the lining of the esophagus that can lead to cancer. Conditions or behaviors that can cause GERD or make it worse include:

- Pregnancy
- Smoking
- Drinking alcohol
- Being overweight
- Consuming certain foods or drinks (fatty or fried foods, chocolate, mint, garlic, onions, citrus fruits or juices, carbonated drinks)
- 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 undigested food from the stomach moves from the esophagus into the mouth. Some people with GERD have chest pain, hoarseness, or asthma (wheezing and trouble breathing).

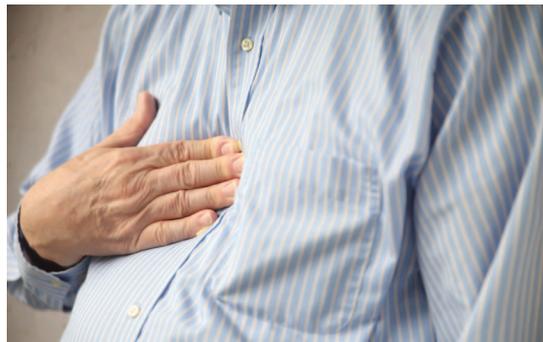
## How Is GERD Diagnosed?

- Your doctor may be able to diagnose GERD based on your symptoms. In some cases, medicine that reduces stomach acid is given to see if your symptoms improve. If they do you may be diagnosed with GERD.
- In some patients with prolonged or severe GERD, a long, thin tube called an endoscope is passed through the mouth and stomach to look at the inner lining of the esophagus, stomach, and first part of the small intestine.
- Tell your doctor if you have trouble swallowing or have had weight loss, vomiting, bleeding, loss of appetite, or chest pain. These symptoms need immediate attention.

## How Is GERD Treated?

Treatment for GERD helps to reduce symptoms and heal the esophagus. 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 reduce stomach acid
- Surgery, which may be needed by some people when other treatments do not help

## Questions for My Doctor

- What lifestyle changes should I make to prevent GERD?
- 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 a common problem whereby stomach acid washes up into the esophagus and causes irritation.
- GERD can be caused or made worse by conditions or behaviors like 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, and asthma (wheezing and trouble breathing).
- Treatment includes changes to diet and behavior. Some people may need medicines that reduce stomach acid. Surgery may be needed by some patients when other treatments do not help.

## 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)

### National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases

[www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/health-topics/digestive-diseases/gerd-and-gerd-in-adults/Pages/definition-facts.aspx](http://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/health-topics/digestive-diseases/gerd-and-gerd-in-adults/Pages/definition-facts.aspx)