

AGA Patient Education Section

Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease

Gastroesophageal reflux (heartburn) is when the contents of your stomach back up out of the stomach into the esophagus (the tube that links your stomach and mouth), and can go into your throat and mouth. When the acid from your stomach touches your esophagus, it can cause a burning feeling in your chest or neck, known as heartburn.

Although most people get heartburn from time to time, if yours does not go away and impacts your well-being, it could be GERD. GERD is not life-threatening, but it can negatively impact your daily life, sleep and eating habits.

Symptoms

GERD is not the same in each person, but the most common symptoms are:

- Heartburn, often worse when you are lying down or after you eat.
- Feeling like food is coming back up into your mouth, maybe with a bitter taste.
- Sore or hoarse throat.
- Cough that will not go away.
- Asthma.
- Chest pain.
- Feeling like there is a lump in your throat or as though food sticks in your throat when going down.
- Nausea or throwing up.
- Pain when you swallow.
- Frequent burping.

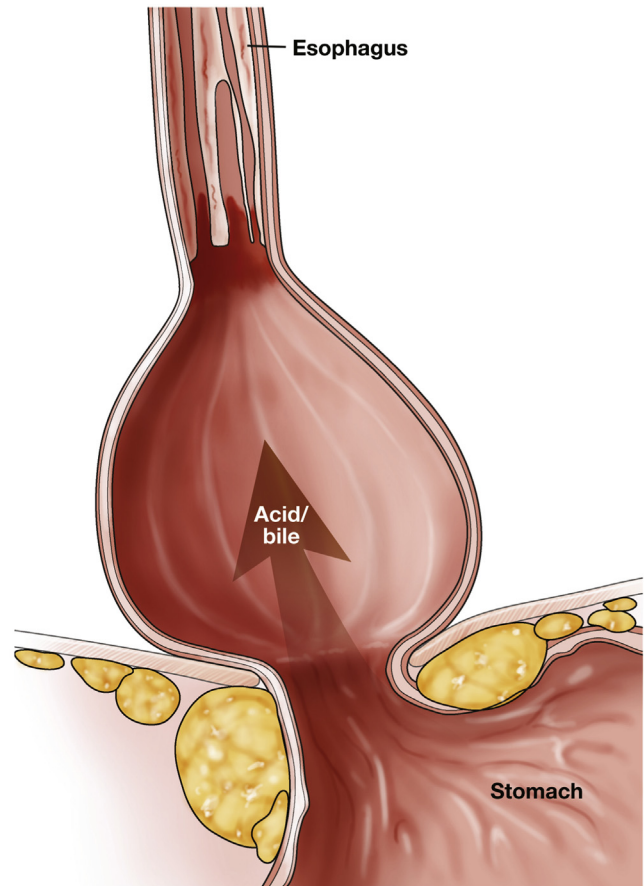
Causes

Many things can cause GERD, such as:

- Muscle weakness in the lower esophageal sphincter (valve), which is supposed to close after food goes into your stomach.
- Certain foods, how fast you eat, and how much you eat can worsen reflux.
- A hiatal hernia, which is a bulging of the stomach into the chest, can cause reflux.

Treatment

Medications and changes in your daily habits can help control symptoms of GERD. Keeping a diary about your diet and symptoms can help you learn what makes it worse and what helps ease your discomfort or pain. Some treatment options are as follows:



- Stay away from items that give you heartburn, such as fried or fatty foods, tomato sauce, citrus fruits, alcohol, coffee, carbonated drinks, chocolate, and vinegar.
- Be careful taking aspirin, anti-inflammatory medications, and pain medications other than acetaminophen. These can make heartburn worse.
- Eat smaller portions of food and stop eating 3 hours before lying down.
- If you are overweight, lose weight.
- Lessen pressure on your belly from tight clothing.
- Stop smoking.
- Try over-the-counter, acid-blocking medications, such as antacids, H2Ras, and proton pump inhibitors.
- A small number of people may need surgery, such as fundoplication, to help get rid of reflux.

For more information on GERD, talk to your doctor and visit www.gastro.org/patient-care/conditions-diseases/gerd.