

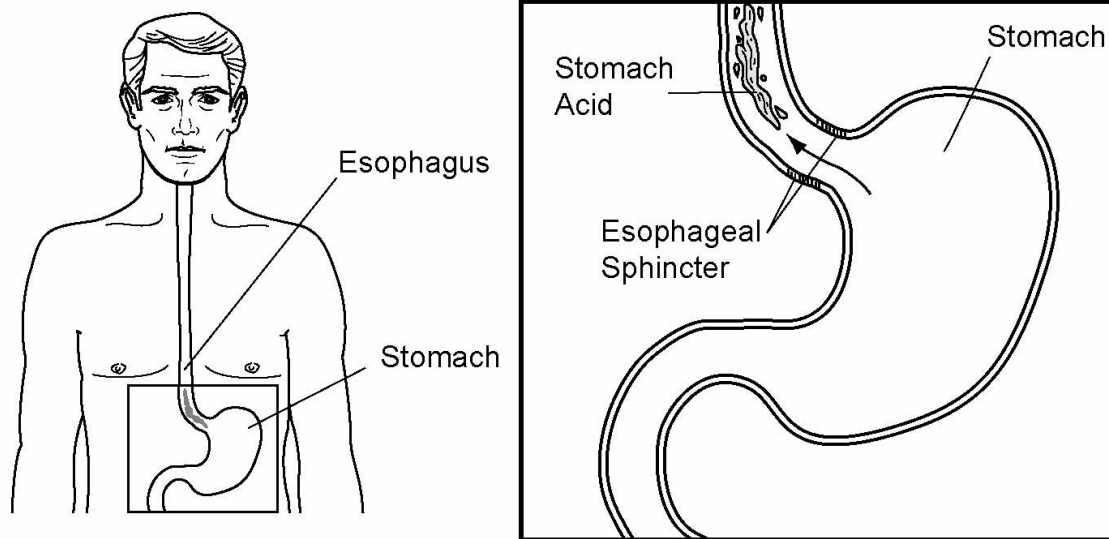
Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
WEXNER MEDICAL CENTER

About GERD

Gastroesophageal reflux disease, also called GERD, is a condition where stomach fluid (acid) backflows or refluxes into the esophagus. This can irritate the esophagus causing heartburn or other signs.



Food and drinks move down the esophagus and into the stomach by muscle contractions. At the lower end of the esophagus, there is a small band of muscle that works like a valve to let food and drinks into the stomach. This is called the lower esophageal sphincter (e-sof-a-geal sfink-ter). Normally, the muscle closes to keep food in the stomach. When it cannot stay closed, stomach contents leak back or reflux into the esophagus. When refluxed stomach fluid (acid) touches the lining of the esophagus, it causes a burning sensation in the throat or chest called heartburn. Having heartburn now and then is common and does not always mean you have GERD.

Causes of GERD

No one knows the exact cause of GERD. It may be caused by an increase of pressure in the stomach or abdomen, or a hiatal (hy-AY-tul) hernia. A hiatal hernia occurs when the upper portion of the stomach is higher than the diaphragm, the muscle wall that separates the chest and stomach. Some other things that may contribute to GERD signs are:

- Being overweight
- Alcohol use
- Pregnancy
- Lying down too soon after eating
- Bending over or lifting heavy objects
- Medicines, such as muscle relaxants

Signs of GERD

If you have any of these signs more than 2 times a week, see your doctor:

- Frequent heartburn or a burning sensation in the throat or chest
- Sour taste or fluid coming back up into the throat after burping
- Chest or stomach pain
- Hoarseness or a dry cough
- Trouble swallowing, also called dysphagia
- Trouble breathing when laying down or sleeping
- Bleeding in the esophagus, a less common sign

Your care

Tell your doctor if there are foods that cause your heartburn, or if there is anything that helps you feel better. Your doctor may refer you to a doctor that treats digestive problems, called a gastroenterologist. This doctor will take a medical history and may do some tests to check your problems. More information will be given to you if you are scheduled for any tests.

General care and prevention of GERD signs includes:

- Raise the head of your bed 6 to 8 inches on bed blocks. Adding extra pillows will not work.
- Avoid food or drink 2 hours before bedtime.
- Avoid lying down for 2 to 3 hours after meals.
- Avoid hard exercise, straining, and bending a lot after meals.
- Do not wear tight clothing.
- Eat a high fiber diet. Constipation can make reflux worse.
- Avoid food or drinks with caffeine, such as coffee (including decaffeinated), tea, chocolate, and colas.
- Avoid alcohol.
- Avoid foods high in fat, especially fried foods.
- Avoid peppermint, licorice, spicy food, or tomato-based food, such as spaghetti, pizza or chili.
- Eat small, meals throughout the day, rather than 1 or 2 big meals a day.
- Stop smoking.
- Stay at your ideal body weight.
- Take medicines as directed by your doctor.
 - If taking over the counter antacids, chew them well and follow with a full glass of water.
 - If taking medicine in the form of capsules, do not empty the capsule, take the whole capsule and follow with a full glass of water.

Talk to your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

For more health information, contact the Library for Health Information at **614-293-3707** or e-mail **health-info@osu.edu**.