

Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD) – A Chronic Digestive Disease

What are GERD and acid reflux?

Acid reflux occurs when acid from the stomach enters the esophagus - the tube that connects the mouth to the stomach. This happens when the valve that allows food through and prevents backflow malfunctions. Acid backflow causes a burning sensation in the lower chest, called **heartburn**. Severe and frequent (more than two times per week) acid reflux is called **gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)**.

Did You Know?

Stomach acid is extremely strong. On the pH scale, it is in the same category as battery acid!



Certain foods and drinks, including tea, can lead to acid reflux and GERD.

Why do people get GERD?

People develop GERD for many different reasons. Unfortunately, those reasons are often unknown, but it is usually associated with certain **foods or drinks**. These include alcohol, sodas, coffee or tea, chocolate, citrus, garlic and onions, mint, foods high in fat, fried foods, and spicy foods. In addition, abnormalities in the stomach can allow acid to rise into the esophagus. **Pregnant** women often have acid reflux due to higher hormone levels and pressure from the fetus. **Smoking** can cause damage to the throat and esophagus, which can contribute to acid reflux. Certain **medications**, such as aspirin, ibuprofen, and blood pressure medications can trigger acid reflux. People who are **overweight or obese** are more likely to experience acid reflux. Certain **activities**, as well, can increase your risk, such as lying down after eating or bending at the waist after a large meal.



Pregnancy can cause acid reflux and GERD.

What are the symptoms of GERD?

GERD comes with many different, unpleasant symptoms. Chronic heartburn is the most ubiquitous. However, hoarseness and sore throat due to acid flowing up into the throat, feelings of a lump in the throat, and chronic dry cough can develop, as well as asthma and laryngitis. Asthma medications can also lead to worsened



GERD can cause chest pain.

cases of GERD. People with GERD often have bad breath and a

Reading Sample



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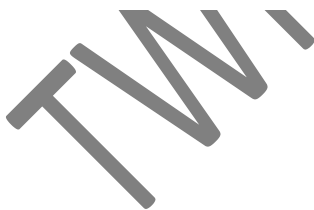
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not lying down after meals, raising the head of the bed, and not smoking can help reduce the risks.



Over-the-counter antacids are used to treat GERD.

Initial over-the-counter treatments include **antacids** to neutralize the acid, medication to lower the body's acid production (**H-2-receptor blockers**), and medication that stops production of acid and repairs the esophagus (**proton pump inhibitors**). Antacids are not a long-term solution and can't repair the damage done to the esophagus. In addition,

using them too much can lead to unpleasant side effects, including diarrhea and constipation. H-2-receptor blockers take longer to act than antacids, but their effects last longer. Proton pump inhibitors are even stronger than H-2-receptor blockers and allow the esophagus to heal.

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In children and infants, lifestyle changes are often the first suggested treatment. Such changes can include smaller, more frequent meals, eating more than three hours before bedtime, losing weight, avoiding spicy, fatty, or acidic foods, avoiding carbonated beverages and tobacco smoke, keeping the head elevated at night, avoiding large meals before activity, and avoiding tight clothes. If these don't work, over-the-counter and prescription medications mentioned above may be recommended. Surgery is always the last resort for children. If surgery is performed and proves ineffective, hospitals provide specialized treatment plans.

Reading Comprehension Questions:

1. What is acid reflux?
2. What is GERD?
3. List
4. List three
5. Name the four methods doctors use to diagnose GERD.
6. Why is
7. Name
8. What are the three types of over-the-counter medications for GERD?
9. Explain
10. What is the first recommended treatment for GERD in infants and children?

Extension Questions:

11. Why is GERD especially dangerous for infants and children?
12. Create an

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