

Medical Management of GERD

MEDICATION

Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) is a disease of the lower esophageal sphincter (LES). Medical treatment of GERD may include medications advised by your doctor and certain diet and lifestyle changes. A combination of approaches and some trial and error may be necessary.

LIFESTYLE CHANGE

Lifestyle changes may help reduce the frequency of heartburn. Consider trying to:

Maintain a healthy weight.

Excess pounds put pressure on your abdomen, pushing your stomach and causing acid to back up into your esophagus. If your weight is healthy, work to maintain it. If you are overweight or obese, work to slowly lose weight---no more than 1 or 2 pounds (0.5 to 1 kilogram) a week. Ask your doctor for help in devising a weight-loss strategy that will work for you.

Avoid tight fitting clothing.

Clothes that fit tightly around your waist put pressure on your abdomen and the lower esophageal sphincter increasing the likelihood of meaningful reflux symptoms. Your clothes should fit comfortably around your waist.

Avoid foods and drinks that trigger heartburn.

Everyone has specific triggers. Common triggers such as fatty or fried foods, tomato sauce, alcohol, chocolate, mint, garlic, onion and caffeine may make heartburn worse. Avoid foods you know will trigger your heartburn.

Eat smaller meals.

Avoid overeating by eating smaller meals. Divide your daily food intake into 3 to 4 snack sized meals. The total serving on your plate should not be bigger than your fist.

Don't lie down after a meal.

Wait at least three hours after eating before lying down or going to bed.

Elevate the head of your bed.

If you regularly experience heartburn at night or while trying to sleep, put gravity to work for you. Place wood or cement blocks under the feet of your bed so that the head end is raised by 6 to 9 inches. If it's not possible to elevate your bed, you can insert a wedge between your mattress and box spring to elevate your body from the waist up. Wedges are available at drugstores and medical supply stores. Raising your head with additional pillows is not as effective.

Don't smoke

Smoking decreases the lower esophageal sphincter's ability to function properly. Ineffective function of the lower esophageal sphincter results in inappropriate reflux of gastric contents into the esophagus resulting in reflux symptoms.

DIET MODIFICATION

Common trigger foods for people with GERD

Although doctors debate which foods actually cause reflux symptoms, certain foods have been shown to cause problems for many people. To control your symptoms, you could start by eliminating the following foods from your diet.

High-fat foods

Fried and fatty foods can cause the LES to inappropriately relax, allowing more stomach acid to reflux back into the esophagus. These foods also delay stomach emptying. Eating high-fat foods puts you at greater risk for reflux symptoms, so reducing your total daily fat intake can help.

The following foods have a high fat content. Avoid these foods or eat them sparingly:

- French fries and onion rings
- Full-fat dairy products such as butter, whole milk, regular cheese and sour cream
- Fatty or fried cuts of beef, pork or lamb
- Bacon fat, ham fat and lard
- Dressings or snacks such as ice cream or potato chips
- Cream sauces, gravies and creamy salad dressings

Tomatoes and citrus fruits

Fruits and vegetables are important in a healthy diet, but certain fruits can cause or worsen GERD symptoms, especially high acidic fruits. If you have frequent acid reflux, you should reduce or eliminate your intake of the following foods:

- Oranges, Grapefruit, Lemons, Limes, Pineapple
- Tomatoes, Tomato sauce or foods that use it, such as pizza, chilli and salsa
- Salsa

Chocolate

Chocolate contains an ingredient called methylxanthine which has been shown to relax the smooth muscle in the LES and increase reflux of stomach acids into the esophagus.

Garlic, onions and spicy foods

Spicy and tangy foods, such as onions and garlic, trigger heartburn symptoms in people.

These foods won't trigger reflux in everyone, but if you eat a lot of onions or garlic, make sure to track your meals carefully in your diet. Some of these foods, along with spicy foods, may bother you more than others.

Caffeine

People with acid reflux may notice their symptoms acting up after their morning coffee. This is because caffeine is a known to weaken the LES resulting in increased acid reflux symptoms. Other caffeinated beverages such as soda and tea can also cause acid reflux symptoms.

Mint

Mint and products with mint flavoring, like chewing gum and breath mints, also can weaken the LES and trigger acid reflux symptoms.

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Foods that may help improve your symptoms

Reflux symptoms may result from too much or too little stomach acid. Here are specific foods you can incorporate into your diet to manage symptoms of acid reflux if you have too much stomach acid.

Vegetables

Vegetables are naturally low in fat and sugar and help reduce stomach acid. Good options include green beans, broccoli, asparagus, cauliflower, leafy greens, potatoes and cucumbers.

Ginger

Ginger has natural anti-inflammatory properties, and it's a natural treatment for heartburn and other gastrointestinal problems such as nausea and bloating. You can add grated or sliced ginger root to recipes or smoothies, or you can drink ginger tea to ease symptoms.

Oatmeal

Oatmeal is a breakfast favorite, a whole grain and an excellent source of fiber. Oatmeal can absorb acid in the stomach and reduce symptoms of GERD. Other fiber options include whole-grain breads and whole-grain rice.

Non-citrus fruit

Non-citrus fruits, including melons, bananas, apples and pears are less likely to trigger reflux symptoms than acidic fruits.

Lean meats

Lean meats, such as chicken, turkey, fish, and seafood are low fat and reduce symptoms of acid reflux. Try them grilled, broiled, baked or poached. Avoid fried or breaded meats.

Egg whites

Egg whites are a good option, however, stay away from egg yolks which are high in fat and may trigger reflux symptoms.

Healthy fats

Sources of healthy fats include avocados, walnuts, flaxseed, olive oil, sesame oil and sunflower oil. Reduce your intake of saturated fats and trans-fats and replace them with these healthier unsaturated fats.

Chewing gum

Chewing gum (not spearmint or peppermint, which can relax the LES) increases saliva production and reduces the amount of acid in the esophagus.