Reducing Heartburn:
Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)
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What is gastroesophageal reflux?

When you eat, food travels from your mouth to your stomach down a long tube called the esophagus. There is a special type of muscle that works like an elastic band where the esophagus joins the stomach. It opens when you swallow to let food and liquids pass into the stomach. It stays closed when you are not eating or drinking. This muscle stops food and liquids in the stomach from coming back up.

In GERD, this muscle does not work properly. It opens up at times when it should be closed. This happens most often after meals and at night. As a result, small amounts of food and acid in the stomach...
stomach move back up into the esophagus. This upward movement of the stomach’s contents is called reflux. The acid may cause irritation and damage to the esophagus.

What are the symptoms of GERD?
Common symptoms:
- Heartburn (a burning, tight feeling in the middle or upper chest)
- Regurgitation into the mouth
- Bitter or sour taste in the mouth
- Pain or discomfort in the upper part of the stomach area
- Too much belching or burping
- Bloating
- Feeling full before you finish your meal
- Feeling uncomfortable after you have eaten

Less common symptoms:
- Chest pain
- Hoarse voice
- Chronic cough
- Globus (a feeling of a lump in the throat)
- Pain or trouble with swallowing
- Feeling of food getting stuck in the throat or chest
- Nausea (feeling sick to your stomach)
Is there a cure?
No, but certain foods and drinks can make GERD worse. Try to change your diet to reduce the irritation of your esophagus.

How can I help my symptoms?
• Eat slowly in a relaxed setting.
• Chew foods well.
• Eat smaller meals: have a snack mid-morning and mid-afternoon if you get hungry.
• Maintain a healthy weight.
• Enjoy a healthy diet by following Canada’s Food Guide:
  › www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide
• Lose weight if you are overweight.
• Drink most liquids between meals.
• Sit upright during meals and avoid lying down or lounging after eating.
• Avoid eating or drinking 3 hours before lying down.
• Avoid clothing that is tight across your stomach.
• Stop smoking.
• Use gravity to help keep your stomach’s contents down by raising the head of your bed by 6 to 8 inches (put wooden blocks under the head of the bed).
What foods can trigger or worsen reflux?

Avoid trigger foods such as:
› Alcohol (beer, wine, spirits)
› Citrus fruits and juices (grapefruit, orange, lemon, lime)
› Chocolate
› Drinks with caffeine (coffee, tea, colas, energy drinks)
› Garlic and onions
› Mint flavourings (spearmint, peppermint)
› Pop and other carbonated drinks
› Spicy foods
› Tomatoes

Cut out gas-forming foods such as:
› Broccoli
› Brussels sprouts
› Cabbage
› Cauliflower
› Corn
› Green peppers
› Soybeans
› Turnips
› Raw vegetables, including salads
› Legumes, such as beans and lentils
› Cantaloupe, honeydew, watermelon
› Popcorn, nuts and seeds
› Unpeeled apples
Avoid high-fat meals and fatty foods

• Choose lower fat foods.
• Limit the fat used in cooking and at the table to 30-45 ml (2-3 Tablespoons) per day.
• Choose low fat dairy products like 1% and skim milk, sour cream and yogurt.
• Choose low fat cheese that is less than 20% milk fat.
• Choose lean meats and poultry. Trim fat and skin before cooking.
• Avoid rich desserts and pastries.

What can my doctor do?

Your doctor can give you several types of medicines that work to lower the amount of acid your esophagus is exposed to. Each type works in its own way. Some of the different types of medicine that may be prescribed to you are listed on the next page.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of drug</th>
<th>Brand or generic name</th>
<th>What it does</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antacids</td>
<td>Tums®, Maalox®, Diovol®</td>
<td>Neutralizes acid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alginic acids</td>
<td>Gaviscon®</td>
<td>Creates a barrier on the top of the stomach to stop stomach acid from moving back up the esophagus</td>
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<tr>
<td>H2 blockers</td>
<td>Zantac® (ranitidine), Tagamet® (cimetidine), Pepcid® (famotidine), Axid® (nizatidine)</td>
<td>Decreases how much acid the stomach makes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proton pump inhibitors</td>
<td>Losec® (omeprazole), Prevacid® (lansoprazole), Tecta® (pantoprazole), Pariet® (rabeprazole)</td>
<td>Decreases how much acid the stomach makes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Motility agent    | Motilium® (domperidone)                   | Usually used with other drugs                                               
|                   |                                           | Helps empty the stomach when emptying is slower than normal                 |
Why is it important to control my symptoms?

Your symptoms are a measure of how much food and acid from your stomach is moving back up into your esophagus. By reducing your symptoms using the measures outlined, you are reducing the exposure of your esophagus to acid. This is important because not only are your symptoms relieved, but the chance of damaging your esophagus is lower.

Chronic reflux can make some health problems worse, such as:

- Chronic obstructive pulmonary (lung) disease (COPD)
- Asthma

Chronic reflux can cause health problems, like:

- Pneumonia
- Dental erosions (acid wears down the enamel on your teeth)
- Throat ulcers
- Esophageal ulcers
- Voice damage
- Esophageal strictures (narrowing of the esophagus)
- Esophageal cancer