



Patient & Family Guide
2022

Reducing Heartburn

Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)

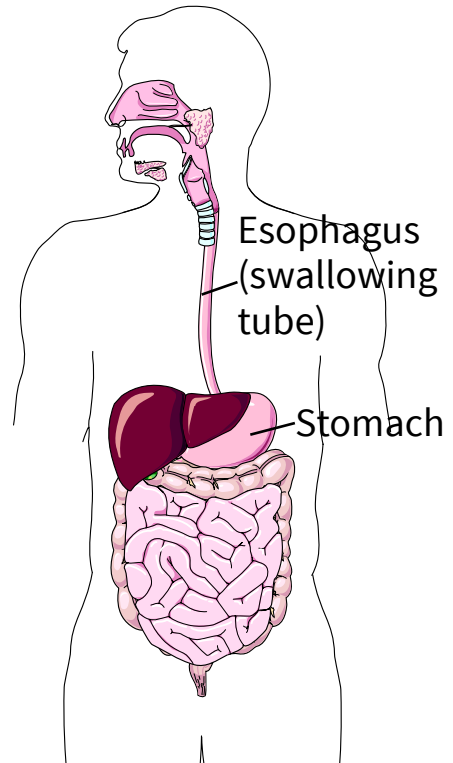


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Reducing Heartburn: GERD

What is gastroesophageal reflux?

- When you eat, food travels from your mouth to your stomach through a long tube called the esophagus.
- A muscle called the lower esophageal sphincter (LES) joins the esophagus and the stomach. This muscle works like an elastic band. It opens when you swallow to let food and liquids pass into your stomach and stays closed when you are not eating or drinking.
- This muscle stops food and liquids in your stomach from coming back up.
- If you have GERD, this muscle does not work well. It opens at times when it should be closed, letting small amounts of food and acid from your stomach move back up into your esophagus. This upward movement of the stomach's contents is called reflux.



- Stomach acid can irritate (bother) and damage the esophagus.
- This happens most often after eating and when lying down.

What are the symptoms of GERD?

Common symptoms include:

- Heartburn (a burning, tight feeling in the middle or upper chest)
- Regurgitation into your mouth (sour burps)
- Bitter or sour taste in your mouth
- Pain or discomfort in the upper part of your stomach area
- Burping often
- Bloating
- Feeling full before you finish a meal
- Feeling uncomfortable after you eat

Less common symptoms include:

- Unexplained chest pain
- Bad breath
- Hoarse voice
- Chronic (ongoing) cough
- Globus (feeling like there is a lump in your throat)

- Pain or trouble with swallowing
- Feeling of food getting stuck in your throat or chest
- Nausea (upset stomach)

What can I do to help or prevent GERD?

- Lifestyle and diet changes can make a big difference. Your quality of life will get better by managing your reflux.
- **To help your symptoms:**
 - › Eat slowly.
 - › Eat in a calm space.
 - › Chew foods well.
 - › Eat smaller meals. Have a snack mid-morning and mid-afternoon if you get hungry.
 - › Eat until you feel content, not until you feel full.
 - › Keep a healthy body weight.
 - › Drink most liquids between meals.
 - › Sit upright at a table during meals. Avoid slouching or lounging while eating.
 - › Do not lie down or lounge after eating.
 - › Do not eat or drink for 3 to 4 hours before lying down.

- › Avoid clothing that is tight across your stomach.
- › Stop smoking. Smoking lowers LES pressure.
- › Do not chew gum.
- › Do not use straws.
- › If you sleep on your side, sleep on your left side. Do not sleep on your right side.
- › Try using gravity to help keep the contents of your stomach down. Raise the head of your bed by 6 inches (about 15 centimetres). You can use a foam wedge under your mattress or put wooden blocks under the head of the bed. **Do not use pillows to prop yourself up.** This can put pressure on your stomach and make GERD worse.
- › Notice what foods may be triggers for you.

What foods can trigger reflux or make it worse?

- **Avoid foods that lower LES pressure, such as:**
 - › Alcohol (beer, wine, spirits)
 - › Chocolate
 - › Drinks with caffeine (coffee, tea, colas, energy drinks)

- › Mint flavouring (spearmint, peppermint)
- › Fried foods
- › Fatty foods
- › Spices (cinnamon can be a trigger for some people.)
- **Avoid acidic and spicy foods that irritate the esophagus, such as:**
 - › Citrus fruits and juices (grapefruit, orange, lemon, lime)
 - › Tomatoes and tomato-based foods
 - › Pop and other carbonated drinks
 - › Spicy foods
 - › Garlic
- **Do not eat foods that cause gas, such as:**
 - › Broccoli
 - › Brussels sprouts
 - › Cabbage
 - › Cauliflower
 - › Corn
 - › Garlic
 - › Green peppers
 - › Onions
 - › Soybeans
 - › Turnips
 - › Raw vegetables, including salads
 - › Pulses (beans, peas, lentils), dried or canned
 - › Melons (cantaloupe, honeydew, watermelon)
 - › Popcorn, nuts, and seeds
 - › Unpeeled apples

- **Avoid high fat meals and fatty foods.**
- Choose lower fat foods.
- Limit the fat you use to cook and at the table to 30 to 45 ml (2 to 3 tbsp) a day.
- Choose low fat dairy products (like 1% and skim milk, sour cream, and yogurt).
- Choose low fat cheese that has less than 20% milk fat.
- Choose lean meats and poultry (like chicken, turkey, etc.). Trim off the skin and any fat you see before cooking.
- Bake, broil, barbeque, roast, boil, steam, or poach your food.
- Avoid rich desserts and pastries.
- Avoid convenience foods.
- Avoid fast foods and restaurant meals.

How can my primary health care provider help?

Your primary health care provider can give you medication(s) that lowers how much acid hits your esophagus. Each medication works in its own way. See the examples on the next page.

Type of drug	Name	What it does
Antacids	Tums [®] , Maalox [®] , Diovol [®]	Neutralizes acid
Alginic acids	Gaviscon [®]	Creates a barrier at the top of the stomach that stops stomach acid from moving back up the esophagus
H2 blockers	Zantac [®] (ranitidine), Tagamet HB 200 [®] (cimetidine), Pepcid [®] AC (famotidine), Axid [®] AR (nizatidine)	Lowers how much acid the stomach makes

Type of drug	Name	What it does
Proton Pump Inhibitors (PPIs)	Losec [®] (omeprazole), Prevacid [®] (lansoprazole), Tecta [®] (pantoprazole), Pariet [®] (rabeprazole)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lowers how much acid the stomach makes • Stronger than H2 blockers
Motility agent	Motilium [®] (domperidone)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually used with other medications • Helps empty the stomach when emptying is slow

Why is it important to control my symptoms?

- Your symptoms tell you how much food and acid from your stomach is moving back up into your esophagus. By lowering your symptoms using the information in this guide, you are lowering how much acid hits your esophagus. This is important because it not only lowers your symptoms, but also lowers the chance of damaging your esophagus.

- **Chronic reflux can make some health problems worse, such as:**
 - › Chronic obstructive pulmonary (lung) disease (COPD)
 - › Asthma
- **Chronic reflux can cause health problems, such as:**
 - › Pneumonia (lung infection)
 - › Dental erosions (acid wears down the enamel on your teeth)
 - › Throat ulcers
 - › Esophageal ulcers
 - › Voice damage
 - › Esophageal strictures (narrowing of the esophagus)
 - › Esophageal cancer

Follow Canada’s Food Guide healthy eating recommendations when planning your meals:

Eat a variety of healthy foods each day.

- Eat a lot of vegetables and fruits.
- Eat protein foods.
 - › Choose protein foods that come from plants more often.

- Choose whole grain foods.
 - › Limit highly processed foods.
- Make water your drink of choice.
 - › Replace sugary drinks with water.

Be mindful of your eating habits

- Take time to eat.
- Notice when you are hungry and when you are full.
- Cook more often.
- Plan what you will eat.
 - › Involve others in planning and preparing meals.
- Enjoy your food.
 - › Culture and food traditions can be a part of healthy eating.
- Eat meals with others.

It can be hard to make changes to your eating habits. If you have questions, please ask to talk with a dietitian.

We are here to help you.

Dietitian: _____

Phone: _____

Notes:

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Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.
For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>
Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time: call 811 or visit <https://811.novascotia.ca>
Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit <http://ns.211.ca>

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Illustration by: LifeART Super Anatomy 1 Images, Copyright © 1994, TechPool Studios Corp. USA
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LC85-1424 © January 2022 Nova Scotia Health Authority
The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.

