

Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease

“Acid Reflux” or “Heartburn”

What is it? Why treat it?

Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), also known as “**acid reflux**” or “**heartburn**”, occurs when stomach contents escape from the stomach and move into the esophagus (the tube that connects your mouth to your stomach).

Normally, there are a group of muscles called a “**sphincter**” that keep the opening between the esophagus and stomach closed, which prevents the reflux. However, various situations can cause the sphincter to relax when it should not, which can allow the stomach contents to flow back up into the esophagus.

The contents of the stomach are very **acidic**. The stomach can withstand the acidity due to numerous modifications, including a layer of mucous that **protects the stomach from acid**. The esophagus, however, does not have this protective mucous layer. Therefore, when stomach contents enter the esophagus, it is **painful** and damages the esophagus. Left **untreated** for many years, GERD can damage the esophagus repeatedly, **increasing the chance of developing esophageal cancer**.

What will it do to me?

With GERD, you may experience:

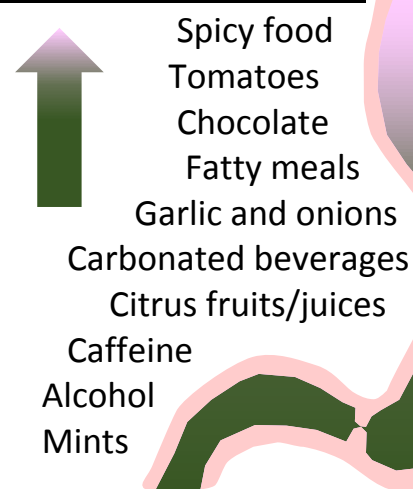
- **burning sensation** after big meals
- **difficulty swallowing**
- **sour taste** at the back of the mouth
- **foul breath**
- sensation of a **lump** in your throat
- new or worsening **asthma**
- new or worsening **cough**
- **disrupted sleep**

How Can I Help?

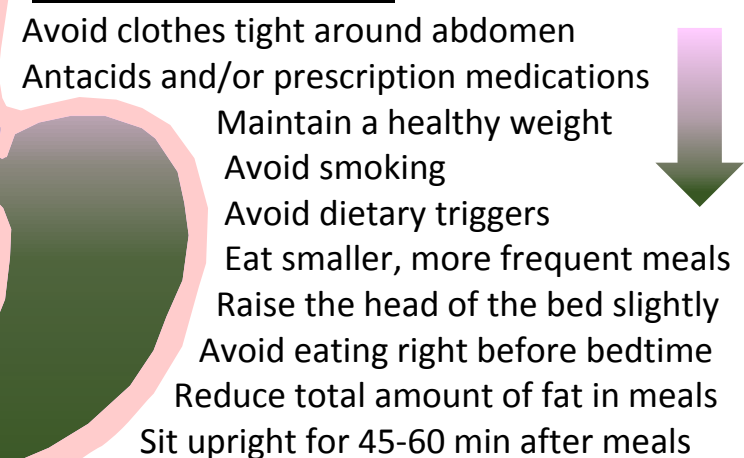
Many foods can make GERD worse, but there are also many changes you can make to improve your symptoms (see image below).

If you are worried about symptoms of reflux, see your family physician. They may prescribe medications to reduce the acidity of your stomach contents, such as proton-pump inhibitors (PPIs such as pantoprazole and rabeprazole) or H₂ blockers (such as ranitidine).

Makes Reflux Worse:



Makes Reflux Better:



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This educational tool was developed by

Robert Jie Guo from the Schulich Medicine Class of 2019.

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Patient-doctor learning area: Use this area to write down questions for your doctor or use it as a space for your doctor to answer your questions.

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