

## Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)

### Overview:

- It occurs due to the reflux of stomach acid to the esophagus causing a burning pain behind the chest bone
- Making some lifestyle changes helps ease the symptoms
- Antacids are effective but the recurring burning sensation requires medical care
- Maintaining a healthy lifestyle and healthy weight are key prevention methods
- It is important to treat persistent heartburn as it harms the esophagus with time.

### Definition:

Gastroesophageal reflux disease, or GERD, is a digestive disorder that affects the lower esophageal sphincter (LES), the ring of muscle between the esophagus and stomach. Many people, including pregnant women, suffer from heartburn or acid indigestion caused by GERD

### Other names:

Gastroesophageal reflux disease, GERD, heartburn

### Cause:

In the normal digestion process, the lower esophageal sphincter (LES) opens to allow food to pass into the stomach and closes to prevent food and acidic stomach juices from flowing back into the esophagus. Gastroesophageal reflux occurs when the LES is weak or relaxes inappropriately, allowing the stomach's contents to flow up into the esophagus.

### Risk factors:

- Obesity
- Smoking
- Pregnancy
- Hiatal Hernia
- Medications that weaken the function of the Sphincter

### Symptoms

- Pain and burning in the chest that could reach the throat and cause larynx infection and congestion
- Pain and difficulty when swallowing
- An acidic taste in the mouth, gingivitis, bad mouth smell
- Dry cough
- Hiccups
- burping
- increased saliva

Symptoms may worsen when bending or laying down or after excessive eating.

#### Reflux triggers:

- anxiety and stress
- eating large meals
- eating spicy food
- eating acidic products
- eating tomato products like ketchup and sauce
- eating fatty and fried food
- eating chocolates
- eating onions
- caffeinated drinks such as gaseous drinks, coffee, etc.
- mint

#### when to see a doctor?

- when the burning sensation occurs for two or more days in a week
- when there is difficulty in swallowing food or fluids
- persistent nausea or vomiting
- weight loss due to the loss of appetite
- when symptoms persist despite taking medications

#### Complications

- Esophagitis
- Digestive ulcers
- Barrett's syndrome abnormal cells form and take the place of the cells damaged by [acid reflux](#).
- Narrowing of the Esophagus

#### Diagnosis:

- X-ray with barium
- Esophagoscope
- Testing acidity concentration

#### Treatment:

- Simple antacids
- H2 blockers.
- Proton pump inhibitors (PPIs)



### Prevention:

- Avoid foods and drinks that trigger the burn
- Quit smoking
- Maintain normal weight

### Tips to ease the symptoms:

Make some changes in your lifestyle, such as:

- Refraining from laying down immediately after eating
- Eat 2-3 hours before going to bed
- Divide meals into small spaced meals throughout the day
- Avoid wearing tight clothes
- Raise the head area in the bed by 15 – 20 cm

### FAQs:

- **When is GERD considered a medical condition?**  
When reflux and burn is experienced for two days or more per week, or severely for more than one day a week
- **Does drinking milk treat GERD?**  
Drinking milk may ease the burn in the beginning but the effect is temporary and later leads to stimulating the production of stomach acids, especially if the milk is full fat.
- **Does eating cucumbers ease the burn?**  
There is no scientific evidence, but cucumber is not an irritant and this is subject to individual experience – some patients find it helpful and others find it useless
- **Does wearing corsets cause acid reflux and heartburn?**  
Yes – for those who are susceptible or have more than one risk factor

### Misconceptions:

- Reflux in pregnant women is the result of the baby's hair growth:
- Fact: GERD in pregnant women is caused by several factors, including:
  - Increase in pregnancy hormone which relaxes the stomach muscle
  - The growth of the womb pressures the stomach and causes the burn. The baby's hair has nothing to do with it
- Smoking relieves stomach acidity
- Fact: smoking is one of the key causes of stomach and Esophagus diseases and doesn't ease the burn. Also, nicotine causes relaxation of the stomach muscle
- It doesn't hurt to keep taking antacids without medical prescription
- It is not advisable to take antacids for more than two weeks without medical assessment to find out the cause, if any, and treat it.



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