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*First in Digestive Health*



## Acid Reflux, Heartburn and GERD

Acid reflux, or heartburn, occurs when a group of muscles at the low end of the esophagus opens spontaneously, or does not close properly, causing stomach contents to rise into the esophagus. When this happens, stomach acid may cause a burning sensation in the chest or throat. If acid reflux occurs more than twice a week, it may be due to Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD), a more serious form of acid reflux that can lead to complications if left untreated.

### When to See a Doctor

Occasional heartburn is common and typically resolved with over-the-counter medications. When symptoms occur more frequently (two or more times per week), seem severe, or do not respond to over-the-counter medications, it's time to see a doctor.

### Diagnosis and Testing

The best diagnostic “test” for any condition is a thorough exam and consultation with a physician, including a review of personal and family history. In addition, a physician may recommend the following tests or procedures to confirm your acid reflux diagnosis and/or rule out other possible causes.

- ▶ An x-ray of your upper digestive system
- ▶ An upper endoscopy to visually examine the lining of your esophagus
- ▶ pH testing to monitor the amount of acid in your esophagus
- ▶ Motility testing to measure the movement and pressure in your esophagus

### SYMPTOMS CAN INCLUDE:

- ▶ Chest pain, burning, or discomfort
- ▶ Cough
- ▶ Difficulty swallowing
- ▶ Hoarseness
- ▶ Indigestion and/or heartburn

### RISK FACTORS INCLUDE:

- ▶ Pregnancy
- ▶ Anatomical abnormalities, such as hiatal hernia
- ▶ Obesity
- ▶ Lifestyle habits, such as consuming certain foods and beverages

## Treatment and Prevention

It may not be possible to prevent acid reflux from developing but there are a number of treatment options available to manage and improve your symptoms:

- ▶ Follow a special diet
- ▶ Avoid eating at least 2 hours before bedtime
- ▶ Consider lifestyle changes such as weight loss and smoking cessation
- ▶ Take over-the-counter and/or prescription medication as directed.
- ▶ In some cases, surgery may be necessary.

People who experience chronic acid reflux, occurring two or more times per week, may develop a condition called Barrett's esophagus. In Barrett's esophagus, the composition of the cells that line the esophagus changes, usually due to repeated exposure to stomach acid, and the risk for developing esophageal cancer increases. To diagnose this condition, your gastroenterologist will perform an upper endoscopy with biopsy. Patients with Barrett's esophagus should be monitored closely by their physician.

## Diet and Acid Reflux

The food you eat can have a direct impact on acid reflux. Citrus-based foods are high in acid, while fried and fatty foods require your digestive system to produce extra acid. Following a diet free from foods that cause or aggravate symptoms may significantly improve your condition. Avoid eating the following:

- ▶ Acidic fruits and juices, such as grapefruit and orange
- ▶ Fried and fatty foods
- ▶ Tomato-based foods
- ▶ Garlic and onions
- ▶ High-fat dairy products
- ▶ Spicy foods
- ▶ Chocolate
- ▶ Alcohol and carbonated beverages

## LOCATIONS

### Washington, DC

**Metropolitan Gastroenterology Group**  
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**Washington Gastroenterology**  
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#### Prince George's County

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