



**CAPITAL
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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
- ▶ Persistent 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

2021 K St, NW, Suite 500
240-737-0085
106 Irving St, NW, Suite 205S
240-737-0085

Maryland

Frederick County

.....
IJAMSVILLE, MD
3280 Urbana Pike, Suite 204
301.810.5252

Howard County

.....
COLUMBIA, MD
5500 Knoll North Drive, Suite 460
410.730.9363

Prince George's County

.....
LAUREL, MD
7350 Van Dusen Rd, Suite 210
301.498.5500

Montgomery County

.....
BETHESDA, MD
10215 Fernwood Rd, Suite 404
240-737-0085

CHEVY CHASE, MD

5550 Friendship Blvd, Suite T-90
240-737-0085

GERMANTOWN, MD

20528 Boland Farm Rd, Suite 201
301.593.2002

OLNEY, MD

3410 Olandwood Ct, Suite 206
301.593.2002

ROCKVILLE, MD

9420 Key West Avenue, Suite 202
301.251.9555

9711 Medical Center Dr, Suite 308
301.251.1244

15005 Shady Grove Rd, Suite 350
301.593.2002

14955 Shady Grove Rd, Suite 150
301.340.3252

SILVER SPRING, MD

10801 Lockwood Dr, Suite 200
301.593.2002

TAKOMA PARK, MD

7610 Carroll Ave, Suite 250
301.270.3640

CHEVY CHASE CLINICAL RESEARCH

5550 Friendship Blvd, Suite T-90
Chevy Chase, MD 20815
301.652.5520

PATHOLOGY LABORATORY

4831 Telsa Drive, Suite F
Bowie, MD 20715
240.737.0080