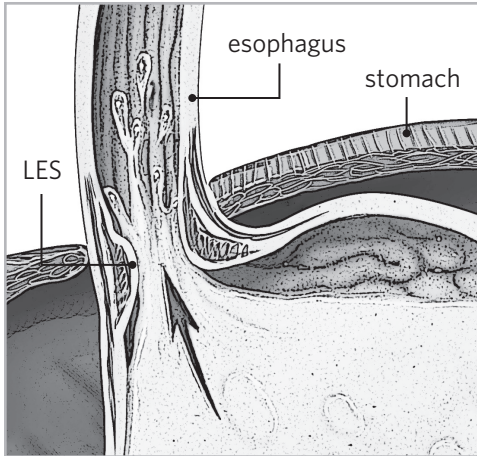


Acid Reflux Disease and Heartburn



When you have heartburn and acid reflux, your LES (lower esophageal sphincter) opens when it shouldn't.

This causes acid from your stomach to wash back up into your esophagus, or even into your throat and mouth. Your stomach makes acid to help break down food so you can digest it.

Over time, this constant backwash of stomach acid can irritate and damage your esophagus. If this happens, it can lead to complications like swelling or narrowing of your esophagus. But there are steps you can take to help reduce your symptoms, including taking medicine and making lifestyle and diet changes.

Symptoms

If you have heartburn symptoms more than twice a week, you may have acid reflux disease, or GERD (gastroesophageal reflux disease). Symptoms of acid reflux disease include:

- **a burning feeling in your chest**
- **chest pain, especially after bending over, lying down or eating**
- **a burning feeling in the back of your throat**
- **frequent burping**
- **hoarseness or a sore throat**
- **hot or sour fluid at the back of your throat**
- **feeling as though food is stuck in the middle of your chest or throat**

Causes

When you have acid reflux, this means that something in your body isn't working the way it should. For example, your LES might be weak or something could be putting extra pressure on your stomach.

A weakened LES can be a result of:

- **drinking alcohol**
- **smoking**
- **eating certain foods**—including chocolate, caffeine and foods high in fat

Extra pressure on your stomach can be caused by:

- **eating large meals**
- **wearing tightly fitting clothes or belts**
- **pregnancy**
- **being overweight**
- **hiatal hernia**—a condition that causes part of your stomach to push up through your diaphragm (chest muscle)

Acid reflux can also be triggered when your stomach makes too much acid. Your doctor can help you figure out what may be causing your symptoms.

Treatment

If you have acid reflux disease, the goals of treatment are to relieve symptoms, and prevent or heal damage to your esophagus. Your doctor will work with you to find a treatment that's right for you. Options include:

- **Antacids**—These lessen the effects of stomach acid. They act quickly, but only help reduce symptoms once they start. They don't prevent or heal damage to your esophagus.



To learn more, visit:

- **International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders**
www.aboutgerd.org
- **National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse**
www.digestive.niddk.nih.gov

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- **Acid blockers**—These medicines, also called H2 blockers, limit the amount of acid your stomach makes. They take a little longer to work than antacids, but they usually last longer.
- **Proton pump inhibitors (PPIs)**—These keep your stomach from making too much acid. They can help heal damage to your esophagus and keep symptoms from coming back.

What You Can Do

You can help reduce symptoms of acid reflux disease by making these changes in your daily life:

Eat small meals. Eating large portions can make your symptoms worse. Try eating six small meals a day, instead of three large ones. Also remember to eat slowly.

Don't go to bed full. Eat dinner at least 3 to 4 hours before lying down. This gives the acid levels in your stomach a chance to calm down.

Avoid trigger foods. Certain foods, including coffee, soda, orange juice, chocolate, tomatoes, onions, garlic, mint, fried foods, alcohol and caffeine can make heartburn worse.

Manage your weight. Extra weight puts pressure on your abdomen. This pushes up your stomach and causes acid to back up into your esophagus. If you're overweight, make a plan with your doctor to lose weight.

Raise your head. Instead of lying flat, try to raise the head of your bed, so that your head and chest are higher than your feet. You can do this by placing 6-inch blocks under the bed posts at the head of your bed. If you can't lift your bed, try inserting a wedge between your mattress and box spring. But don't use pillows—they can put you in a position that may make heartburn worse.

Don't smoke. Smoking makes your LES relax, and tobacco can cause your stomach to make too much acid. For help quitting, talk to your doctor and visit www.smokefree.gov.

Keep track of what seems to bring on your symptoms. If certain foods or activities always cause you heartburn, you can take steps to avoid them.

Remember:

- Don't ignore symptoms of acid reflux. Over time, they can cause damage to your esophagus.
- Talk to your doctor if you take antacids more than twice a week.
- Keep track of possible foods and drinks that may trigger symptoms, so you can take steps to avoid them.