

GERD **(Gastroesophageal reflux Disease)**

What is it?

GERD (or Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease) occurs when a small valve (the lower esophageal sphincter or LES) between the stomach and esophagus leaks, causing digestive fluids and stomach acid to “back up” from the stomach into the esophagus. This acid can irritate the esophagus, leading to symptoms. GERD can also damage the delicate lining on the inside of the esophagus, leading to more serious problems in some patients.

Frequent heartburn is the most common symptom of GERD and often occurs after meals. It is often described as an uncomfortable, rising, burning sensation behind the breastbone. Other major symptoms of GERD are: regurgitation of gastric acid or sour contents into the mouth; difficult and/or painful swallowing; and chest pain.

GERD Diet

A diet designed to prevent or reduce GERD is usually easy to follow. The basic food groups of cereals, vegetables, fruits, dairy products, and meats can be consumed with the following exceptions:

- Fatty or fried foods
- Peppermint and spearmint
- Chocolate
- Most fast foods
- Citrus fruits and juices (grapefruit, orange, pineapple, tomato)
- Coffee/tea (regular and decaffeinated)
- Caffeinated soft drinks
- Alcohol

Helpful Lifestyle Recommendations:

- Bed blocks – elevate the head of your bed 2-6 inches with wood blocks or bricks. Using extra pillows is NOT a good substitute. Use of a foam wedge beneath the upper half of the body is an alternative.
- Do not lie down for two hours after eating – allow gravity to work. Also, avoid bending over at the waist to pick things up, instead bend at the knees.
- Stop using tobacco in all forms – nicotine weakens the lower esophageal muscle.
- Avoid chewing gum and hard candy – they increase the amount of swallowed air, which in turn, leads to belching and reflux.
- Avoid tight clothing – tight belts, tight pants or girdles can increase the pressure on the abdomen.
- Antacids – can be taken at bedtime and 30-60 minutes after each meal or as directed by your physician.
- Eat smaller meals – do not overfill your stomach.
- Maintain your ideal weight – excess weight increases the amount of pressure constantly placed on your stomach.