



GERD: Gastro-Esophageal Reflux Disease

What is GERD?

GERD is a common condition that we face increasingly as we get older, but which can be present at all ages. GERD occurs when acid from the stomach refluxes, or leaks up into the esophagus—the muscular tube that leads from the mouth to the stomach. This can cause a wide variety of symptoms, including:

- Frequent heartburn (the most common symptom)
- Bitter stomach fluid coming into the mouth, especially during sleep
- Sour or bitter taste in the mouth
- Hoarseness/raspy voice
- Repeatedly feeling a need to clear the throat
- Difficulty swallowing food or liquid
- Wheezing or coughing at night
- Worsening of symptoms after eating, or when bending over or lying down
- Nausea

Ways to prevent GERD

- Avoid caffeine and smoking, which can relax the sphincter, or valve, between the stomach and esophagus, allowing acid to leak upwards
- Avoid alcohol, especially red wine
- Do not eat or drink within 2-3 hours of going to bed
- Avoid spicy and acidic foods
- Eat small meals
- Elevate the head of the bed
- If overweight, weight loss can improve symptoms

How to treat GERD

When prevention fails, we have several ways of treating GERD:

- Simple antacids—TUMS, Rolaids, etc.—can often do the trick. Taken as directed, they have almost no side effects. They neutralize acid that has already been produced.
- “H2 blockers” reduce acid production in the stomach, and offer more long-lasting relief than antacids. H2 blockers generally start working within the hour, and last for up to 12 hours. Some examples of these, which are available over the counter, are ranitidine (Zantac), famotidine (Pepcid), and cimetidine (Tagamet.)
- “Proton pump inhibitors” (PPIs) can offer even stronger and more long-lasting relief—sometimes for 24 hours or more. These pills act by preventing most of the acid from being produced by the stomach cells. Omeprazole (Prilosec) is a PPI that is available over the counter.

Excessive use of acid-suppressants can have side effects, such as making the body vulnerable to certain infections, and decreasing the absorption of certain nutrients. It is important to keep checking with us, your clinicians, to make sure we are doing everything correctly to help relieve you from this condition.

We pledge not only to care for you, but to care about you.