

Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)

Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) is a condition in which food or liquid from the stomach travel backward from the stomach to the esophagus. This causes irritation to the tissues of the esophagus leading to heartburn and other symptoms.

The most common symptoms of GERD are:

- Belching/Burping
- Cough or wheezing
- Difficulty swallowing – lump sensation
- Heartburn – burning pain in chest under breastbone, more frequent or worse at night, often relieved by antacids.
- Hoarseness or change in voice
- Nausea and vomiting
- Regurgitation of food
- Sore throat
- Vomiting blood

Lifestyle actions can make GERD symptom worse. Triggers for GERD include:

- Smoking
- High fat, Acidic or Spicy foods
- Coffee, alcohol, carbonated soft drinks, chocolate, peppermint, tomatoes
- Being overweight
- Eating too much at one time
- Bending over after eating
- Lying down within 3 hours of eating
- Wearing tight fitting clothing

The majority of people respond to lifestyle changes and medications. Treatment aims at decreasing the amount of reflux or reducing damage to the lining of the esophagus.

Other treatment options include:

- Avoiding foods and beverages that worsen GERD are recommended.
- Eating smaller, more frequent meals.
- Eating meals at least two to three hours before bedtime may lessen reflux by allowing the stomach to empty partially before lying down.
- Weight Loss. Many overweight people find relief when they lose weight.
- Smoking cessation.
- Elevating the head of the bed on 6-inch blocks uses gravity to minimize reflux of stomach contents into the esophagus. (Just using extra pillows will not have the same effect).

For chronic reflux and heartburn a healthcare provider may prescribe daily medication. Antacids are used to neutralize acid or medication to block or reduce acid production.

Sources and/or additional resources:

- Mayo Clinic: <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/gerd/basics/definition/con-20025201>
- Up-To-Date: http://www.uptodate.com/contents/acid-reflux-gastroesophageal-reflux-disease-in-adults-beyond-the-basics?source=search_result&search=GERD&selectedTitle=2~18

If you are a registered Millersville University student and you have questions or you need to make an appointment, please call Millersville University Health Services at 871-5250.