

GERD

What is GERD?

Indigestion is an uncomfortable feeling you can get after eating a large meal. There may be bloating, belching, heartburn, and nausea. GERD (gastroesophageal reflux disease), occurs when the stomach contents containing the digestive juices that contain acid, rise up into the esophagus (the tube that carries food from the mouth to the stomach). Occasional acid indigestion is common and does not mean a person has GERD.

What are the symptoms of GERD and why is it treated?

The most common symptom is heartburn – a burning-type feeling in the chest or abdomen sometimes spreading into the throat leaving a sour taste in the mouth. Other symptoms may include difficulty swallowing, a dry cough, hoarseness, or a sensation of a lump in the throat. Overtime, if left untreated, this constant backwash of acid can irritate the lining of the esophagus and can cause complications such as bleeding or breathing problems.

Seek immediate emergency care if there is chest pain with pain going into the jaw or down the arm, or shortness of breath as this maybe a sign of a heart attack.

What are the causes or GERD?

The reason that some people develop GERD is unclear. There is a one way valve between the esophagus and the stomach called the LES (the lower esophageal sphincter). Sometimes this valve relaxes or weakens, and then acid is able to go up into the esophagus. Being overweight, pregnancy and smoking can make the symptoms worse. Some common foods that can make symptoms worse include – citrus fruits, chocolate, caffeine, alcohol, fatty or fried foods, mint, garlic, onions, and spicy foods.

How is indigestion or GERD treated?

There are many medications that work in different ways for the treatment of indigestion and GERD. You may need a combination of medications. If medications do not control symptoms after a few weeks, you may be referred to a specialist called a gastroenterologist, who may recommend further testing.

What other things may help?

Maintain a healthy weight. Wait at least 2-3 hours after eating before lying down or going to bed. Stay away from foods that cause discomfort, avoid tight fitting clothes and stop smoking. Putting the head of the bed up on 6-9 inch blocks helps to keep the acid from traveling up into the esophagus.