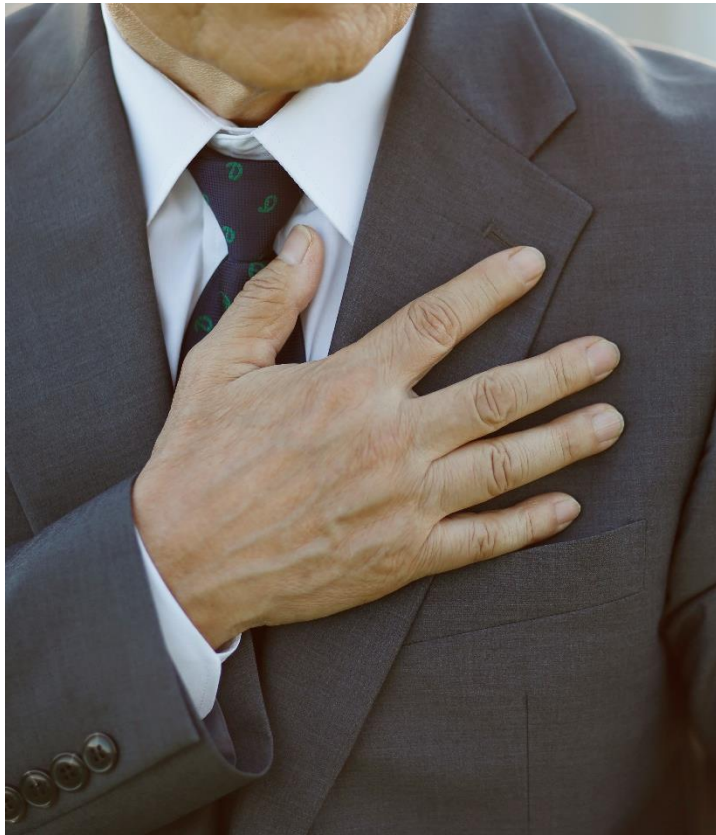


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# Acid reflux: Got GERD?



Acid Reflux occurs when stomach acid leaks back up into the esophagus. The symptoms include chest pain, heartburn (a hot sensation felt in the chest or throat after eating), dry cough, regurgitation of food, or a sour-tasting liquid in your mouth. Many of the symptoms seem to increase at night, when lying in bed.

Anyone can experience mild symptoms of reflux on an irregular basis simply from normal daily occurrences, including size of meals, physical activity, sleep loss, body position and pressure changes between the stomach and chest cavity.

Reflux is common in babies (but less common in those breastfed) and most outgrow it within a year. Women many experience reflux during pregnancy, from the increase of pressure on the abdomen. Reflux can also be associated with obesity, from the abdominal fat putting pressure on the

abdominal cavity. Aging will also loosen the tightness of the lower esophageal sphincter, thereby increasing the risk of acid backflow. Lack of sleep and certain medications can create Acid Reflux in all ages.

However, reflux becomes gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) when the symptoms occur more than once a week and on a weekly basis.

Food moves down the esophagus and then passes through the lower esophageal sphincter (LES) before ending up in your stomach. If the LES fails to close tightly, acid from the stomach may flow back up into the esophagus, causing Acid Reflux.

The LES prevents backflow of the powerful acids which kill microorganisms, help break down food and assimilate its nutrients. But if the esophagus is exposed too often to a backflow of acid (GERD), it becomes damaged and chronically inflamed. The damage leads to much more than just chest pain or a burning throat. It can also contribute to chronic coughing, asthma, laryngitis, pulmonary disease, dental erosion, and even cancer of the esophagus.

Sadly, reflux is becoming a common disorder. Even in China and some European countries, where it was once rare, cases of reflux have increased. Experts attribute several factors to the loss of tension in the LES: less sleep and increases in body fat, eating more calories, dietary fats, processed foods and drinking more alcohol.

It's not known what the exact cause of Reflux is; much of the research shows a correlation, not causation. But there are steps you can take to minimize your discomfort or your risk of developing GERD.

Eating a diet high in fibre seems to help (although researchers are not sure why) and a diet low in fat. Focus more on lots of whole grains, fruit and vegetables. High fat diets seem to create a chain of events that relax the LES, which you don't want to happen. Fats also take longer to digest so they stay in the stomach longer, which increases stomach pressure and in turn promotes reflux.

Other suggestions are to eat slowly, chewing your food well. Mealtimes should be relaxing and stress-free. Eat until you are satisfied; avoid overeating and stuffing yourself. Those with GERD should avoid lying down for at least 30 – 60 minutes after eating. If symptoms are worse when lying in bed at night, elevate the head of your bed a few inches. Excess abdominal fat puts pressure on the abdomen, pushing upward on the stomach. Therefore, weight loss may be a good idea if you are overweight. Tight clothes can also press into the abdomen and the LES.

Factors shown to worsen reflux include large meals, coffee, chocolate, alcohol, nicotine, carbonated drinks, and processed foods. Some find citrus or tomatoes aggravate them, but each of us may have specific triggers. Researchers find people with reflux are most likely to eat irregular meals, fast food and high sugar foods, very hot or very cold foods, very spicy foods, and very fat-dense foods. Smokers are also more prone to GERD, as nicotine affects the ability of the LES to function properly.

Some medications and supplements may cause reflux, and medications for reflux can have side effects. Talk with your doctor or pharmacist.

*Eve Lees has been active in the health & fitness industry since 1979. Now retired, she was a Freelance Health Writer for several publications and gave speaking presentations to business and private groups on various health topics. <https://www.artnews-healthnews.com/health-writing>*

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