Is your heartburn or indigestion getting the best of you? Our experienced gastroenterologists can help.

Acid Reflux

Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)
A digestive health eGuide
My heartburn is killing me. I know I eat all the wrong foods (I Googled it) and I like to have chili for lunch and a few cups of coffee in the morning. But why should I have to make “lifestyle changes” when I can just take a stronger pill than the over-the-counter ones I’ve been taking? I saw a commercial the other night that said you can still enjoy the foods you crave if you get this particular prescription.

I wish I could tell patients that there is indeed a miracle pill that relieves all their symptoms no matter what they eat or drink. But it is a little more complicated than that.

If over-the-counter meds are not working very well any more, a step up to prescription medications might be both necessary and effective. But it doesn’t mean you don’t need to make lifestyle changes as well. Make an appointment with a GI doctor and start getting on top of your heartburn. You will likely need to make some lifestyle changes, but you probably won’t have to give up everything you like to eat.

Lately, I’ve been plagued with indigestion. I know that it’s because of my eating habits at work. We’re under so much pressure lately that I usually just snack my way through the day with whatever is in the break room. Then I visit the vending machines for a midafternoon motivational treat. And I’m drinking way too much coffee.

I really want to eat better so that I can feel better. I know that my body’s giving me some pretty strong messages. Am I hurting anything by putting these changes off until things settle down at work? I’m currently taking over-the-counter antacids all day, every day.

I think you’re at the point where you need to put your health first and find a good GI specialist. Ongoing symptoms such as indigestion or heartburn can end up causing damage to the esophagus, leading to more serious conditions. So it’s probably a good idea to prioritize your health and start taking better care of yourself now, starting with a visit to your GI doctor.

Also, try to up your lunch game by eating healthier food at work. I suggest packing a bento box with fruit slices, nuts and other snacks so that you have a vending machine alternative (in healthy portions) right at your desk.

After seeing my primary care doctor — who put me on some prescription meds — and working really hard on lifestyle changes (eating and drinking right), I still have bad heartburn two or three times per week. Sometimes it wakes me up in the middle of the night. It is driving me crazy. Now what?

If your lifestyle changes and medications are not fully addressing the triggers for your heartburn symptoms, you need to see a specialist who’s trained in the latest diagnostic and treatment options. Relieve your distress by seeing a gastroenterologist as soon as you can. You deserve to feel better and get a good night’s sleep.
Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) is more commonly known as acid reflux

- It is common, affecting 20–40 percent of the population in the industrialized world
- It affects people of all ages
- It is caused by acid from your stomach backing up through the esophageal sphincter into the esophagus, which is the tube that your food travels down
- Prolonged, frequent or intense GERD symptoms could damage the esophagus or the esophageal sphincter, resulting in esophagitis and Barrett’s esophagus, a pre-cancerous condition
- Most people with GERD symptoms respond well to lifestyle changes, sometimes supported by medication
- If, after giving lifestyle changes a fair trial, your acid reflux symptoms are still causing you trouble more than twice a week, you should see a gastroenterologist (a doctor who specializes in diseases of the digestive tract)

What are the symptoms of GERD?

If you’re experiencing any of the following symptoms of GERD twice per week or more, or severe symptoms weekly, you need to see a gastroenterologist:

- Burning sensation in chest, esophagus or stomach
- Indigestion or burping
- Nausea or vomiting
- Coughing
- Difficulty breathing
- Acidic taste in the back of the throat

What are the risk factors for GERD?

Most often, GERD develops because of lifestyle choices, but some people have risk factors due to other health conditions, including:

- Obesity
- Smoking (including second-hand smoke)
- Low levels of physical exercise
- Medications, including drugs for asthma, calcium channel blockers, antihistamines, painkillers, sedatives and antidepressants
- Structural problems in the esophageal sphincter
- Hiatal hernia
- Pregnancy
Most people with acid reflux symptoms benefit from lifestyle changes. But as you know, these are not always easy to make.

Good health is the best of all rewards, even if you might have to cut back on or give up some of the things you used to enjoy. See if you can figure out what triggers your symptoms and then take steps to reduce or eliminate the culprits.

**10 tips to deal with common triggers of GERD symptoms and get relief:**

1. Just say no to sparkling water or carbonated beverages of any kind
2. Reduce the amount of alcohol you consume, especially in the evening
3. Eliminate or reduce the amount of caffeine you consume, including coffee, tea, cola and chocolate
4. Don’t overeat; eat slowly and stop before you feel full
5. Eliminate high fat, processed and highly acidic or spicy food
6. Eat your last meal of the day early in the evening, when you have time to digest it before going to bed
7. If your symptoms mainly appear when you go to bed, try propping up the head of the bed with blocks so that it is about 4–6 inches higher than the foot of the bed
8. If you smoke, stop
9. If you are overweight, lose weight
10. Some prescription medications (including antidepressants, antihistamine and painkillers) can cause GERD symptoms; ask your doctor or pharmacist about this possibility

**5 foods that are the worst culprits for acid reflux flare-ups:**

1. Fried foods — try giving up potato chips, fried chicken, french fries, deep-fried pickles and — you get the picture
2. High-fat foods — avoid full-fat dairy products, fatty meats, processed meats, fast food and practically anything in the dessert department, including ice cream, cake and cookies
3. Tomatoes — reduce your consumption of raw tomatoes, salsa, pizza, pasta sauce and chili
4. Onions, garlic and spicy foods — keep these foods to a minimum
5. Citrus fruit — say no to highly acidic fruits such as oranges, lemons, limes, pineapples and grapefruit

**5 foods that might help relieve your symptoms:**

1. Oatmeal and whole grains, to absorb acid
2. Healthy fats such as avocados, walnuts and olive oil
3. Non-citrus fruits
4. Vegetables
5. Lean poultry, fish and seafood
At AMITA Health, we take your digestive concerns seriously. Our experienced specialists offer innovative diagnostic and treatment options to meet your individual needs.

If you cannot control your GERD by making changes to your diet and lifestyle we can help.

Take the first step and schedule an appointment with one of the caring gastroenterologists on staff at the AMITA Health Digestive Health Institute’s Center for Gastroenterology. You’ll be relieved that you did.

To make an appointment call 855.790.7552

Want to learn more about GERD? Start here:

Center for Gastroenterology
https://www.amitahealth.org/services/digestive-health-institute/center-for-gastroenterology/gastroesophageal-reflux-disease

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