

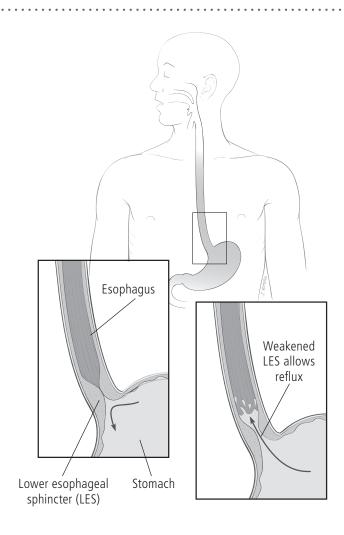
# **GERD** (Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease)

A sour taste in the back of your throat. Heartburn again and again. If you regularly experience these symptoms, you may have **GERD** (short for **gastroesophageal reflux disease**). It's a common problem, one that can usually be cured with treatment.

## What is GERD?

GERD is a condition in which food and acids in the stomach move back up into the esophagus. This is called **reflux**. Stomach acid from reflux can irritate the esophagus and cause heartburn, indigestion, and trouble swallowing. When reflux continues, it becomes GERD. Here's how reflux can happen:

- Normally, when you swallow food it goes from your mouth, down your esophagus, and to your stomach. As the food enters your stomach, it passes through a ring-shaped muscle called the lower esophageal sphincter (LES). A healthy LES opens to let food into the stomach, and closes to prevent food and stomach acid from backing up.
- **2** When the LES is weakened, food and stomach acid can move back up into the esophagus and throat, causing reflux.



## Symptoms — and when to call a doctor

Call your doctor	Call your doctor RIGHT AWAY
Contact your doctor if you have ongoing problems with any of the following:  • Frequent heartburn or chest pain, especially when lying down  • Trouble swallowing  • Sour-tasting fluid backing up into your mouth  • Coughing a lot, and over a long period of time  • Wheezing or hoarseness  • Symptoms that get worse when you eat, bend over, or lie down	Call your doctor right away if you experience the symptoms listed below. These symptoms could indicate more serious medical problems such as a heart problem or an ulcer:  Vomiting red blood, or blood that looks like coffee grounds Passing black, tarry, or bloody stools Losing weight unexpectedly

### How is GERD treated?

GERD is often treated with the lifestyle changes listed below. If symptoms persist, your doctor may recommend medical treatments. In a few cases, surgery may be necessary.

#### Lifestyle changes

The lifestyle changes below can reduce the irritation of your esophagus. Often they can even correct mild forms of GERD.

- Don't lie down for 2 hours after eating. Don't bend over at the waist either. Let gravity help your digestion.
- Avoid foods that cause symptoms. These often include fatty foods, spicy foods, chocolate, onions, tomato sauce, carbonated beverages, and mint.
- Limit coffee to no more than 2 to 3 cups per day.
- · Avoid alcohol.
- **Avoid tight clothing** such as tight belts, tight pants, or girdles.
- **Take an antacid** at bedtime and 30-60 minutes after each meal, or as directed by your doctor.
- Review your medications. Check with your doctor if you're taking certain medications, including sedatives, tranquilizers, and some types of blood pressure medicines.
- **Eat smaller meals** so your stomach isn't holding too much food at once.
- **Stop smoking.** If you can't stop smoking, then at least cut back.
- Lose extra weight. Too much weight can put pressure on your stomach and cause reflux.

#### Medical treatment and tests

When GERD is moderate to severe, your doctor may recommend one or more of the following:

- Prescription or over-the-counter medicines.
   Your doctor may recommend an antacid or other medicine to control acid or to strengthen the LES.
   Be sure to take your medicines regularly, and just as your doctor prescribes.
- **Endoscopy.** This procedure allows the doctor to view the inside of your esophagus with a camera and identify and sometimes treat any problems.
- **Dilation**. This procedure is done during an endoscopy and stretches your esophagus if it's constricted.

#### Surgery

If other treatments don't relieve your GERD, your doctor may recommend a surgery called **laparoscopic fundoplication**. This surgery allows the doctor to support the esophagus and strengthen the LES.

## What if I don't treat my GERD?

If you don't treat GERD, complications can occur. These include ulcers, bleeding, and anemia (low blood count).

Long-term GERD can also lead to scarring and narrowing of the esophagus (stricture) making it difficult to swallow, and Barrett's esophagus, which is a serious change in the cells lining the esophagus. If you have symptoms, see your doctor. Treatment can usually prevent these complications.