

Nutritional Guidelines for Managing Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)

Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) is a condition that occurs when the esophageal muscle that keeps food in the stomach does not close properly. This allows the stomach contents to leak back into the esophagus and cause a burning feeling often referred to as heartburn. Other symptoms to be aware of include sore throat, hoarse voice, cough, difficulty swallowing, chest pain and a feeling of a lump in your throat.

If left untreated, reflux may cause damage to the esophagus. Below you will find dietary and lifestyle changes that may help. If your symptoms continue, talk to your doctor about other medical treatments available for you.

Tips to help manage your symptoms

The types of foods that trigger reflux differ between each person. Focus on the suggestions that help improve your symptoms.

- Keep a food journal for one week. Record everything you eat and drink, the quantity, time of day, and symptoms that may follow. This will help to identify trigger foods.
- Avoid common foods that cause symptoms
 - spices, chili, black pepper and cayenne
 - citrus fruits and juices
 - caffeine products (coffee, tea, cola)
 - acidic vegetables (tomatoes, garlic, onions)
 - peppermint
 - chocolate
 - alcohol and carbonated beverages
- Choose lower fat products such as:
 - Skim or 1% milk/yogurt, low fat cheese
 - Avoid deep fried foods and foods made with excessive amounts of fat (French fries, cookies, cakes, pizza, chocolate etc.)
 - Remove all the visible fat and skin on meat and poultry. Use lean ground meats and drain excess fat off.
 - Limit the amount of added fat in cooking and at table to 2-3 Tbsp each day (i.e. margarine, butter, oil, salad dressing, mayonnaise etc.)

- Maintain a healthy body weight (BMI between 18.5-25). Being overweight is a risk factor for reflux.
- Include regular physical activity. Adults should accumulate at least 2.5 hours a week of moderate to vigorous physical activity (fast walking, biking, running, swimming etc).
- Avoid eating large portions at one time as this may increase your symptoms. Aim for small, frequent meals. Follow Canada's Food Guide Healthy Plate Model. For more information go to <http://www.healthycanadians.gc.ca>
- If you drink, only do so in moderation. Men should limit their drinks to no more than 15 per week (no more than 3 per day on most days), and women to no more than 10 per week (no more than 2 per day on most days). One drink equals 12oz. bottle of beer/cider/cooler, 5 oz. glass of wine, 1.5 oz. shot of 40% spirits.
- Avoid lying down two-three hours after eating.
- Avoid eating less than two hours before bed.
- Raise your bed 20cm when sleeping.
- Sleep on your left side.
- Wear clothing that is not tight across your waist.
- Avoid smoking

Adopted from Dietitian of Canada, Eating Guidelines for Managing Reflux handout 2016
 Eat Right Ontario, Managing Gastroesophageal Reflux, 2016

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