

Diet Tips for Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)

What is GERD?

Normally, there is a strong muscle that keeps stomach acid in your stomach where it belongs. In GERD (gastroesophageal reflux disease), this muscle is weak. This allows stomach acid to flow upward into the tube that carries food from your mouth to your stomach, called the esophagus. This can cause a burning feeling in the chest often referred to as "heartburn." People who have GERD may also have other symptoms like trouble swallowing, chest pain, and coughing.

Can I control it with diet?

There are some diets and lifestyle changes that may ease the symptoms of GERD. However, there are no strong scientific data to support any specific diet therapy. Success with dietary changes varies from person to person – what works for one person may not work for another. So, you should adjust your diet and lifestyle based on what best helps your symptoms.

The only recommendation that does apply to all individuals is:

IF A FOOD BOTHERS YOU, DON'T EAT IT!

There are some foods that doctors and Registered Dietitians usually suggest you limit or avoid altogether. Some people with GERD may find that skipping these foods helps their GERD symptoms. But if you stop eating these foods and your symptoms do not get better, then there is no need to keep avoiding them.

Common Trouble Foods for GERD	
Spicy foods	Chocolate or brownies
Raw onion, garlic, black pepper	Caffeine (sodas, coffee, tea, etc.)
Citrus products and juices (orange, grapefruit, or cranberry juice)	Fatty or greasy foods (fast food, salad dressing, potato chips, donuts, pastries, ice cream, etc.)
Tomato products	Peppermint

Other dietary changes that may help:

- Eat smaller meals more often instead of 3 big meals.
- Try to eat more slowly. Aim for 30 minutes per meal.
- Avoid eating on the run. Sit down and enjoy your food.
- Avoid large, high fat meals.
- Avoid late evening snacks or eating before bed.
- Avoid lying flat after eating. Try sitting up for at least an hour after finishing a meal.
- Try keeping a food journal for at least a week to keep track of what foods trigger your symptoms.

What about lifestyle changes?

Changing some of your habits might help your GERD. Remember to avoid CATS: Caffeine, Alcohol, Tobacco, and Stress.

- Try limiting or stopping caffeine altogether to see if your symptoms improve. Caffeine is found mainly in sodas, coffee, and tea.
- Do not drink alcohol.
- Stop smoking.
- Limit or reduce stress in your life. Try participating in an exercise, yoga, or meditation program.
- Avoid tight fitting clothing around the abdomen, including underwire bras.
- If you are overweight, lose weight. Even a small weight loss can help.
- Try light walking for 15-30 minutes following a meal.
- Try chewing non-mint gum for 30 minutes following a meal.
- Sleep on your left side. Remember, “right is wrong.”
- Elevate the head of your bed 6 to 8 inches to prevent reflux when you are sleeping. Extra pillows may only elevate your head. Instead:
 - Try putting pillows between the mattress and box springs near the head of the bed.
 - Or, use a special wedge. One option is the Mattress Genie® Adjustable Bed Wedge, but many are available.

Additional resources

International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders:
www.aboutgerd.org

The University of Virginia Health System, Digestive Health Center, GI
Nutrition website: www.GInutrition.virginia.edu