

GERD (GastroEsophageal Reflux Disease)

Lifestyle Changes

- **Weight reduction.** Obesity increases pressure on the abdomen and stomach, which can increase pressure on the lower esophageal sphincter and cause reflux .
- **Smoking.** Smoking increases GERD symptoms. It decreases lower esophageal sphincter pressure and reduces salivary secretion
- **Fatty foods.** The relationship between dietary fat and GERD is unclear. Dietary fat is thought to delay emptying of the stomach. Reducing dietary fat is important for health in general and part of an overall strategy to reduce GERD symptoms .
- **Irritating foods and beverages.** These may affect some individuals, and each person's reaction may be unique. Foods that might aggravate GERD include tomatoes, garlic, onions, chocolate, peppermint, coffee, and citrus fruits. Reactions vary considerably. Monitor reactions to specific foods.
- **Meal size and frequency.** Avoid eating large meals, which can stimulate sensors that affect lower esophageal sphincter relaxation. Eat smaller meals more frequently, perhaps four or five times daily. Do not eat for at least two or three hours before bedtime.
- **Upper body elevation.** Use gravity to help keep stomach contents out of the esophagus. Elevate the upper portion of the body, including the head, at least 6 inches by raising the mattress (or entire head end of the bed frame itself) with telephone books, foam, or wood blocks. Doctors used to recommend raising the head only, but this can cause a bend at the waist and may actually increase pressure on the stomach. Elevating the entire upper body throughout the night can produce remarkable relief for GERD sufferers. Also try to lie on the left side to exert less pressure on the esophageal sphincter. A study found that sleeping on the left side is the preferred position for patients with nighttime gastroesophageal reflux .
- **Limitation of aspirin, ibuprofen, and other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs.** Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs inhibit formation of prostaglandins, thus promoting reflux. Prostaglandins inhibit gastric acid secretion and stimulate secretion of mucus and bicarbonate to minimize the effects of acid reflux.
- **Avoidance of chewing gum and hard candy.** Both chewing gum and hard candy increase the amount of swallowed oxygen and can lead to belching and reflux.