

Nutrition Tips for Reflux (GERD)

What is reflux?

Reflux (also known as heartburn or GERD) is when the stomach contents flow back into and irritate the food pipe (esophagus). This often leads to a burning feeling in the chest that can spread to the throat. This is called heartburn. Reflux may also leave a bitter taste in the mouth or make it feel hard to swallow.

What causes reflux?

Most often, the cause is a weak or poorly working muscle sphincter at lower end of the esophagus. The way you eat and certain foods may be a part of this problem. Increased pressure on the abdominal area also can lead to reflux.

How You Eat

This may be more important than what you eat.

- Eat slowly, taking about 30 minutes for a meal.
- Chew foods well to make it easier to swallow and to help clear food from the esophagus more quickly. Try to not “wash” down partially chewed foods with liquids.
- Try to relax around meal times. Sit down for all meals and snacks. Give your body enough time to feel satisfied by eating smaller meals more often. Try pausing mid-meal to check if you feel satisfied.
- Don’t eat too close to bedtime. Allow 2-3 hours before bedtime to digest your food.
- Sit upright for at least one hour after eating. If you can, try gentle walking and move around for 15 minutes after eating.

What You Eat

Each person reacts in different ways to food. Try new foods to learn which diet changes work for you. If your symptoms do not get better after cutting a food out of your diet, there is no need to avoid it.

- Eat protein-rich foods in small amounts throughout the day, rather than one large meal. Lean proteins include chicken, turkey, tuna, tofu, lean beef and pork, low fat cheese, skim or 1% milk, lentils and beans.
- Eat less high fat foods like deep fried foods, fatty ground beef, marbled meats, sausage, hot dogs, brats, chicken nuggets, chicken wings, whole milk, chocolate, regular salad dressings, donuts, pastries, candy bars, etc. Fat takes longer to digest and may worsen reflux.
- Avoid coffee (decaf and regular), caffeinated tea and all carbonated drinks. The effect of decaf tea on reflux is unclear.
- Avoid alcohol, peppermint or spearmint candies, gums and liquors.
- Try eating less citrus fruits and juices, highly seasoned (garlic and onion or spicy) foods, as well as tomato products. Some people feel worse with these foods.
- Choose whole-grain and high-fiber foods often, to promote healthy bowel function.
- Limit chewing gum and hard candies, as well as use of drinking fountains and straws. This will decrease the amount of swallowed air which often leads to belching and reflux.