



“More than 60 million Americans experience heartburn symptoms”

What Is GERD?

Gastro-Esophageal Reflux Disease (GERD) is a condition where acid from the stomach is frequently pushed up into the esophagus.

The acid can damage the protective lining of the esophagus and cause a burning sensation in the chest and throat.

These symptoms, commonly described as heartburn or indigestion, are not usually serious but can be quite uncomfortable.

Some people experience GERD symptoms occasionally while others have symptoms every day.

Common “Triggers” of GERD

Many, everyday “triggers” can cause or worsen heartburn by:

- Increasing the amount of acid our stomachs produce
- Making it easier for that acid to be pushed into our esophagus

Common causes include:

- High stress
- Spicy, fatty, or salty food
- Citrus fruit or fruit juice
- Medications like ibuprofen or naproxen
- Potassium or Iron Supplements
- Obesity
- Smoking
- Caffeine or alcohol
- Carbonated Beverages

What are common symptoms?

- Burning sensation in chest, usually after eating
- Bitter taste
- Chronic cough

When should I seek medical care?

While heartburn is usually not serious, some heartburn symptoms can be caused by a more serious issue.

Seek immediate medical attention if you experience:

- Chest pain that has not been diagnosed as heartburn-related

Make an appointment with your doctor if you experience:

- Difficulty or painful swallowing
- Weight loss
- Sore throat

Medications used to treat GERD

Antacids

Antacids provide immediate relief of symptoms and are a good option for occasional heartburn. They work by temporarily neutralizing stomach acid.

Examples include:

- Tums
- Rolaids
- Mylanta

Histamine-2 (H₂) Blockers

H₂-blockers provide stronger relief than antacids but take about 30-60 minutes to work. They are a good option when you experience heartburn 1-2 times per week. They work by neutralizing and decreasing the amount of stomach acid you make. These medicines can also be taken on a schedule to prevent heartburn.

Examples include:

- Zantac (ranitidine)
- Pepcid (famotidine)

Proton-Pump Inhibitor (PPI)

PPIs are used to prevent heartburn. They are most appropriate if you experience heartburn more than 2 times per week. PPIs are stronger acid suppressors than H₂-Blockers. PPIs must be taken every day and can take up to a week to see the full effect.

Examples include:

- Prilosec (omeprazole)
- Nexium (esomeprazole)
- Protonix (pantoprazole)

When do I consider starting a medication for my heartburn?

- Consult your doctor or pharmacist when considering starting a medication for heartburn.
- Despite being available over-the-counter, these medications come with risks and are not intended to be used for long periods without direction from your doctor.
- Your doctor or pharmacist can help you to decide which class of medication is right for you, and how long it is recommended for you to take them.

Long-Term Use of a Proton-Pump Inhibitor

Recent studies have shown using a PPI for an extended period of time have been associated with increased risk of certain disease. These diseases can range from a type of diarrhea caused by a bacteria called *C. difficile*, osteoporosis, vitamin deficiencies, and kidney disease.

Prevention is Key

Small, everyday changes can provide more significant relief from heartburn symptoms than medication alone.

- Keeping a journal of what items you eat, and if you had heartburn symptoms can help identify what personal “triggers” you should avoid
- Maintain a healthy weight and eat smaller amounts in one sitting
- Avoid eating close to bedtime

Heartburn after Stopping a PPI?

Stopping a PPI abruptly can cause an effect known as “rebound heartburn”.

Rebound heartburn is caused by a sudden increase in acid production by your stomach after you abruptly stop taking a PPI. This is not true heartburn but rather a response to stopping your medicine too quickly.

Tips for stopping your PPI:

- Talk with your doctor or pharmacist to develop a schedule for slowly stopping your medication
- This will reduce the risk of experiencing rebound heartburn.

We care about your health and well-being and our staff of registered nurse care managers, mental health professionals, and clinical pharmacists are here to help. **If you have questions, please call 855-586-2568, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. MT.**