

Gastroesophageal Reflux

Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) is when stomach acid frequently flows back into the esophagus. This acid then irritates the lining of your esophagus. Most GERD is mild to moderate and can be managed with lifestyle changes and over the counter medications.

Frequent Signs & Symptoms

The most common symptoms of GERD are:

- Heartburn or pain in the upper abdomen
- Chest pain
- Difficulty swallowing or pain with swallowing
- Laryngitis (hoarseness or loss of voice)
- Persistent cough
- Sore throat
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Regurgitation of food or sour liquid
- Sensation of a lump in your throat

Causes

Some causes of GERD can include:

- Obesity
- A bulge of the top of the stomach into the diaphragm (hiatal hernia)
- Smoking or vaping
- Eating large meals or eating late at night
- Certain foods and beverages
- Medications such as aspirin or ibuprofen
- Pregnancy

Diagnosis

Your provider may diagnose GERD based on your symptoms alone. In this situation, they will likely suggest a trial of medication; if your symptoms improve, it is likely that GERD was the cause.

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Prevention and Treatment

GERD is usually prevented and treated according to the severity of the symptoms. It includes:

- Lifestyle changes
 - Losing weight
 - Raising the head of your bed six to eight inches
 - Avoiding foods that make your reflux worse
 - Quitting smoking or vaping
 - Avoiding late meals or meals just before bed
- Over the counter medications
 - Antacids such as Tums or Maalox
 - Histamine Antagonists such as Pepcid
 - Proton pump inhibitors (PPI's) as recommended or prescribed by your provider such as Dexilant, Nexium, Prevacid, Prilosec, Protonix

Complications

Most people with GERD will not develop serious complications with treatment. However, serious complications can happen with severe GERD.

- Erosive esophagitis - when the esophagus is damaged from stomach acid
- Esophageal stricture - acid causes the esophagus to scar and narrow
- Dental problems - acid reflux can erode the enamel of the teeth

If symptoms worsen or do not improve, return to the clinic.

If you have worsening of symptoms when the Health and Wellness Center is unavailable, please follow up with the local ER or Urgent Care.