

July 15, 2015

## Ask the Nurse Practitioner



### Acid Reflux

Q: What causes acid reflux?

A: Acid reflux can be caused by various lifestyle factors such as obesity, lying down right after a meal, hiatal hernia and snacking before bed. Certain foods can also cause acid reflux such as tomato, citrus, garlic, onions, sauces, chocolate, and spicy and fatty foods.

Q: Can acid reflux cause you to have a sour taste in your mouth?

A: Yes. Because of the laxity of the LES (lower esophageal sphincter), the acidic stomach contents are able to backflow up through the esophagus allowing for some of the contents to reach the back of your throat and mouth allowing for the sour taste.

Q: What kinds of medications are used to treat acid reflux?

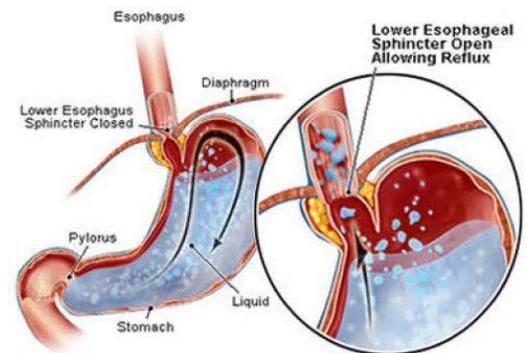
A: Antacids such as Tums, Rolaids and Mylanta. H2 blockers such as Zantac and Tagamet. Proton Pump Inhibitors such as Nexium, Protonix and Prilosec. Prokinetics such as Reglan.

## Acid Reflux – Causes, Symptoms, Diagnosis and Treatment

By Rashida Pollion, FNP – East St. Louis, IL

Acid reflux occurs when some of the acid content of the stomach flows up into the esophagus, which moves food down from the mouth. The stomach contains a very strong acid, hydrochloric acid, which helps with the efficient digestion of food and to protect against bacteria.

Then lining of the stomach is specially designed and adapts to the production of this acid and also to protect the digestive organ against its own corrosive secretion. However, the higher areas of the gut are not protected from this acid.



At the entrance of the stomach is a valve, which is a ring of muscle called the lower esophageal sphincter (LES). Normally, the LES closes as soon as food passes through it. If the LES doesn't close all the way or if it happens too often, acid produced by your stomach can move up into our esophagus. This can cause symptoms such as burning chest pain called heartburn. If acid reflux symptoms happen more than twice a week, you have acid reflux disease, also known as gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD).

### **What causes acid reflux?**

Everyone may experience acid reflux occasionally, often associated with certain foods and drinks.

GERD is seen in people of all ages, sometimes for unknown reasons. Often the cause is attributable to a lifestyle factor, but it can also be due to effects that cannot be prevented.

One common cause of acid reflux is a hiatal hernia. This occurs when the upper part of the stomach and LES move above the diaphragm, a muscle that separates your stomach from your chest. Normally, the diaphragm helps keep acid in your stomach. But if you have a hiatal hernia, acid can move up into your esophagus and cause symptoms of acid reflux disease.

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*Acid Reflux article continued on next page*

## Acid Reflux (continued)

Other common risk factors include:

- Eating large meals or lying down right after a meal
- Being overweight or obese
- Eating a heavy meal and lying on your back or bending over at the waist
- Snacking close to bedtime
- Drinking certain beverages, such as alcohol, carbonated drinks, coffee, or tea
- Eating certain foods, such as citrus, tomato, mint, chocolate, garlic, onions, sauces or spicy or fatty foods
- Smoking
- Being pregnant
- Taking aspirin, ibuprofen, certain muscle relaxers, or blood pressure medications

### What are the symptoms of acid reflux?

Acid reflux, whether it is a harmless, isolated episode or the persistent problem of GERD, it usually produces the same symptom, heartburn. Heartburn is the burning sensation, which tends to worsen when the person lies down or bends over. It can last for several hours and also tends to worsen after eating food. The burning pain moves up toward the neck and throat. The stomach fluid can reach the back of the throat for some, producing a bitter or sour taste.

Other symptoms of acid reflux include:

- Bloating
- Bloody or black stools or bloody vomiting
- Burping
- Dry, persistent cough
- Wheezing
- Asthma and recurrent pneumonia
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Throat problems-soreness, hoarseness, or laryngitis
- Dental erosion
- Bad breath
- Difficulty or pain with swallowing

### How is acid reflux diagnosed?

GERD is often diagnosed simply by finding no improvement in heartburn symptoms in response to lifestyle changes and acid reflux medication. If these steps don't help or if the symptoms become too frequent or severe, your Practitioner may order tests to confirm a diagnosis and check for other problems.

- **Barium swallow:** check for ulcers and narrowing of the esophagus. First swallow a solution, followed by x-rays.
- **Esophageal manometry:** pressure measurement of the esophagus
- **Biopsy:** taking a tissue sample for laboratory analysis
- **pH monitoring:** acidity testing

### Treating acid reflux with diet and lifestyle changes

One of the most effective ways to treat acid reflux disease is to avoid food and beverages that trigger symptoms by

- Eating smaller meals more frequently
- Quit smoking
- Put blocks under the head of your bed to raise it at least 4 to 6 inches
- Try sleeping in a chair for daytime naps
- Don't eat at least 2 to 3 hours before lying down
- Don't wear tight clothes or tight belts
- Take steps to lose weight with exercise and diet changes



**Medications that are used to treat acid reflux:**

- Antacids (Alka-Seltzer, Mylanta, Maalox, Roloids)
- Foaming agents (Gavison) coats your stomach to prevent reflux.
- H2 blockers (Pepcid, Tagamet, Zantac) decrease acid production.
- Proton Pump Inhibitors (Prilosec, Prevacid, Protonix, Aciphex, Nexium) also reduces to amount of acid your stomach makes
- Prokinetics (Reglan, Urecholine) can help strengthen the LES, empty your stomach faster and reduce acid reflux.

Surgical procedures are also available for the treatment of acid reflux if lifestyle changes and medication don't help.

Know and understand your body.

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