

GastroEsophageal Reflux Disease

You've been diagnosed with GERD... now what?

Everything we eat or drink has the possibility of impacting how our gastrointestinal tract feels. This includes the esophagus and stomach. Removing or changing some of the foods you may be eating that make your symptoms worse can help you to feel better and avoid any damage from acid reflux. Some of these you have heard before and others may be news to you, but either way, it's a good idea to make these changes now so you can start getting some relief.

Once you have removed these foods from the diet you may try out reintroduction to see how these make you feel, in order to avoid following too restrictive of a diet without my relief to your symptoms. Everyone is different so you may find that some foods you can tolerate while others make your symptoms worse. Not everyone has the same trigger foods and some people tolerate some foods better than others. Cutting out the major "problem" foods is a good place to start.

Foods to avoid that may increase your reflux symptoms:

- Caffeine
 - This includes coffee, tea (herbal teas are decaffeinated), chocolate, some sodas
- Tomatoes
 - This includes raw tomatoes, tomato sauce, tomato based soups, tomato juice
- Greasy and high fat foods
 - This includes fried foods and other foods high in fat. It is possible even heart healthy fats may cause some discomfort, like avocado and nut butters. Avoid heavy cream based soups and sauces and foods topped with a lot of cheese. High fat foods slow down the rate as which foods move out of the stomach.
- Spicy foods
 - This includes hot peppers and other spices that are added to foods. Don't forget that some condiments can add a lot of "heat" to your foods. Watch out for hot sauce, Sriracha, and lots of black pepper.
- Citrus
 - This includes both juice and the whole fruit. Citrus includes all varieties of oranges, grapefruits, lemon and lime.
- Peppermint
 - This includes gum, tea, or as an ingredient in sweets (chocolate, cookies, candies). Although it may be known to help with an upset stomach, it is also known to irritate reflux symptoms.
- Carbonated beverages
 - This includes soda, seltzer water, or any beverage that may have carbonation, even if it is low calorie.

Besides food, what else can I do?

Lifestyle and behavior changes can also make a difference. As with food changes, what works for one person may not work for another, but for your own comfort these are worth a try.

- Weight loss
 - If you are overweight or obese, weight loss can provide you with many different health issues, including reflux.
 - Avoid fad diets or quick fixes. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is!
 - Instead, make healthy changes to your diet. Cut back on portion sizes. Increase physical activity if you are able to safely do exercise.
 - Include more fruits and vegetables to your meals. Bake or grill low fat meats.
 - Remember that “cheat” days or splurging on weekends or holidays can add up in calories and may also impact your symptoms.
- Sit upright after a meal
 - Give your body a chance to digest your foods without the risk of having anything move back up your esophagus.
- Smaller meals
 - Eating less at each meal and filling gaps between meals with small snacks can be beneficial to controlling symptoms. Less food means less acid production as part of the digestion process. It also means less discomfort from an overfull stomach and pressure from fullness that can push contents of the stomach back up into the esophagus.
- Avoid tight fitting clothes
 - Particularly tight fitting pants. Anything restrictive around the stomach area may be uncomfortable and put added pressure on the stomach, especially after a meal.
- Avoid eating before bed
 - There isn't a magic time to use for when to stop eating before bed. Generally 2-3 hours is enough time to allow for foods to be digested and moved from the stomach.
 - This goes along with the guideline to remain sitting upright after meals. Just as you would after any meal, you don't want to lie down.
 - As dinner is often a larger meal compared to other times of the day, you will want to make sure you giving yourself time to be comfortable when you do go to sleep.

Will following these guidelines help?

While there is no guarantee because everyone is different, you are likely to find some relief from a combination of these recommendations. It's a good idea to be mindful of what you eat and the response you have after eating certain foods. Any food that seems to cause discomfort on more than one occasion may be better off avoided long term. Avoid being too restrictive with your diet. If cutting a food out of your diet doesn't improve symptoms, you likely don't need to avoid it long term. The biggest focus on diet and lifestyle changes should be to help you feel better on a daily basis.