

# Treating Acid Reflux

Also known as **Gastro-Esophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)**

## What is acid reflux?

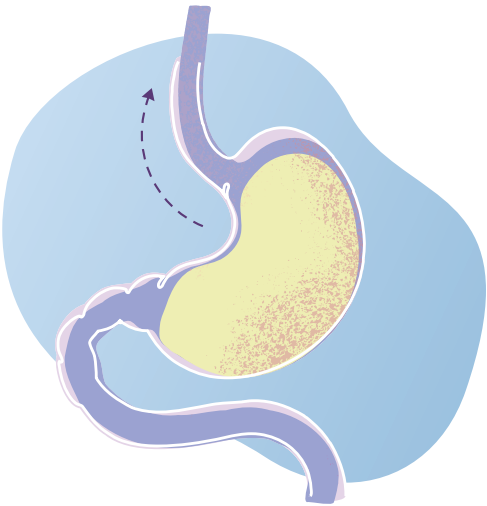
Acid reflux happens when stomach acid and food go back into your esophagus. This is the tube that carries food from your mouth to your stomach. When acid reflux symptoms happen often or cause problems, it is called Gastro-Esophageal Reflux Disease (GERD).



## What are the symptoms of GERD?

The most common symptoms are:

- **Heartburn:** a burning feeling behind the breastbone or in the middle of your chest.
- **Acid regurgitation:** when acid and food come back up into the chest with a burning sensation. It can reach your mouth and cause a sour or bitter taste.

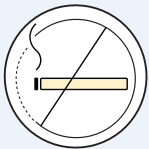


## Why does GERD happen?

GERD happens when stomach acid moves into the esophagus, which is not where it should be. At the bottom of the esophagus, there is a small valve called the lower esophageal sphincter. This valve opens after you eat or drink, then closes again.

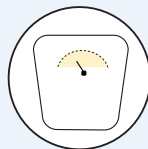
With GERD, the valve doesn't close properly. It stays open after meals or when you lie down. This lets food, liquid, and acid move back up into the esophagus, causing heartburn and acid reflux.

## What are some ways I can improve my GERD symptoms?



### Quit smoking:

This can help GERD symptoms improve. Medications also work better if you don't smoke.



### Lose weight:

If you are overweight, losing weight can help reduce GERD symptoms and problems.



### Avoid trigger foods:

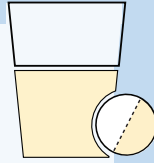
Limit foods that cause symptoms. Eating smaller meals and not eating late at night may help.

# How to treat GERD:

## Antacids

When symptoms don't happen often, you can take antacids. These help by blocking acid and making symptoms better.

Some studies show that antacids with alginate (like Gaviscon®) may work best.

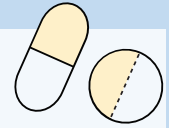


## Acid Lowering Drugs

There are two types of medications that reduce stomach acid:

- proton-pump inhibitors
- histamine-2 blockers

Both lower the acid and fluid in your stomach. This makes reflux less acidic and reduces how much comes up.



## Do I need to see a health-care provider for my acid reflux?

Many people manage acid reflux on their own by making lifestyle changes or using over-the-counter medications. If you need more information, speak with your health-care provider (family doctor, pharmacist, nurse practitioner).

### Speak with a health-care provider if you:

- Are concerned about your symptoms.
- Have heartburn or acid reflux twice a week or more, or if it doesn't get better with treatment.
- Have trouble swallowing, pain when swallowing, or feel like food gets stuck.
- Are losing weight without trying.
- Feel nauseous often, vomit, or notice blood in your vomit or stool (black or red).

Seek urgent care if any of these symptoms are severe.

For information on proton pump inhibitors (PPIs): [www.choosingwiselycanada.org/download/19121](http://www.choosingwiselycanada.org/download/19121)

## About Choosing Wisely Canada

Choosing Wisely Canada is the national voice for reducing unnecessary tests and treatments in health care. One of its important functions is to help clinicians and patients engage in conversations that lead to smart and effective care choices.

This information is for you to use when talking with your health care provider. It is not a substitute for medical advice and treatment.