

# Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)

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GERD is a digestive disorder that allows food and stomach acid to back up into your esophagus. Your esophagus is the tube that connects your mouth to your stomach.

GERD often causes a feeling described as heartburn or acid indigestion.

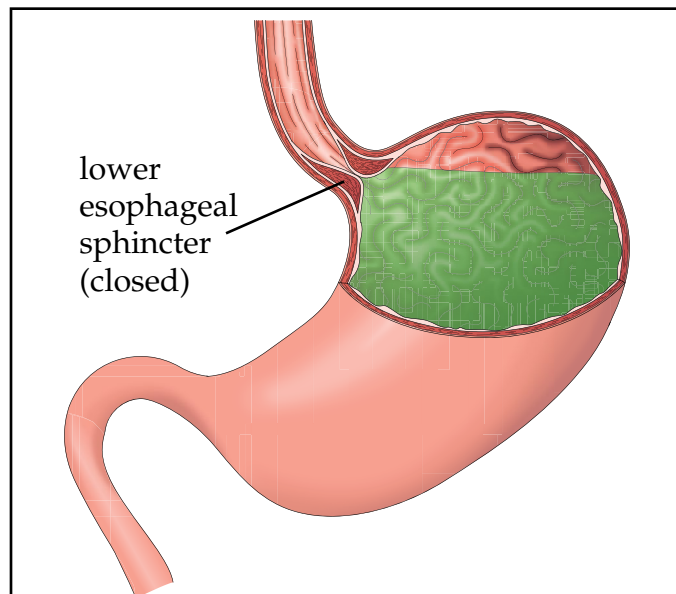
In normal digestion, food moves down your esophagus into your stomach, passing through your lower esophageal sphincter (LES). The LES is a flap valve connecting your esophagus to your stomach. It opens to let food into your stomach and then closes.

If you suffer from GERD, your LES doesn't always work properly. It may be weak or opens at the wrong time.

GERD is not usually a life-threatening disease. Diet, lifestyle changes and medicine help many people find relief.

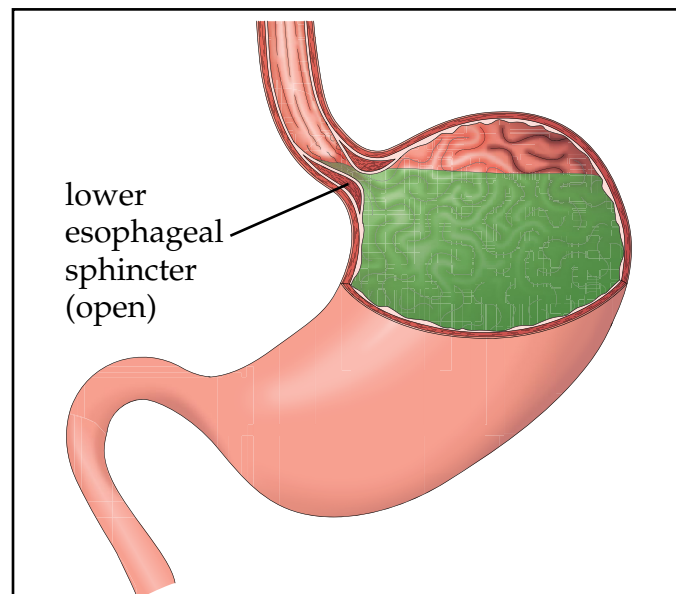
## Causes of GERD

- **Diet:** certain foods and beverages may weaken the LES including chocolate, peppermint, fried or fatty foods, coffee and alcohol. Obesity is also a factor.
- **Cigarette smoking:** it weakens the LES
- **Pregnancy:** hormone changes and a growing uterus that crowds the intestines and stomach
- **Hiatal hernia:** part of the stomach moves into the chest through a small opening in the diaphragm and retains stomach contents above the opening.



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**The LES opens to let food into your stomach and then closes.**



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**If your LES doesn't work properly, it can let food and stomach acid back up into your esophagus.**

**(over)**

## Heartburn: A Sign of GERD

Heartburn (or acid indigestion) is the most common sign of GERD. You may notice heartburn as:

- a burning feeling starting behind your breastbone and moving up toward your throat. (Heartburn is not related to your heart.) It often starts after eating and can last as long as 2 hours.
- a feeling that food is coming back into your mouth
- an acidic or bitter taste in your mouth.

Heartburn may also start if you lie down or bend over after eating. An antacid may give you relief by clearing acid out of your esophagus.

## Laryngopharyngeal Reflux (LPR)

LPR (also called “silent reflux”) is a condition that can be caused by GERD. It happens when stomach acid goes back into your esophagus and up to your throat. LPR doesn’t cause heartburn, but can cause symptoms such as:

- a sore throat
- hoarseness
- chronic (long-term) coughing
- the feeling that something is stuck in the back of your throat.

## Treating GERD

Health care providers recommend dietary and lifestyle changes for most people with GERD. These include:

- avoiding foods and beverages that can weaken the LES: chocolate, peppermint, fried or fatty foods, coffee and alcohol
- avoiding foods and beverages that can irritate an esophagus damaged by refluxed stomach contents: citrus fruits and juices, tomato products and pepper
- eating smaller meals

- eating your last food at least 2 to 3 hours before bedtime
- losing weight if you are overweight
- elevating the head of your bed 6 inches
- taking over-the-counter antacids on a regular basis
- taking prescription medicine your health care provider prescribes if you have long-term (chronic) heartburn.

There are also different types of minimally invasive surgery procedures that can help with GERD. Please talk about these options with your health care provider.

If you have severe, long-term heartburn not relieved by these treatments, your health care provider may order some diagnostic tests such as:

- an upper GI series: special X-rays of your esophagus, stomach and duodenum to rule out other causes of your heartburn
- an endoscopy: an exam of the lining of your esophagus using a tiny video camera on the end of an endoscope. The doctor may take a small sample of tissue (biopsy) for testing
- tests to examine the acid in your esophagus and stomach.

GERD can also be treated by doing surgery to fix the LES.

## Complications of GERD

It is important to treat GERD to avoid some of the serious complications of long-term heartburn. These include:

- esophagitis: too much stomach acid in your esophagus. You could develop esophageal bleeding or ulcers.
- chronic scarring: a buildup of scar tissue that may narrow your esophagus over time
- Barrett’s esophagus: severe damage to the lining of your esophagus. This condition may be a precursor to esophageal cancer.