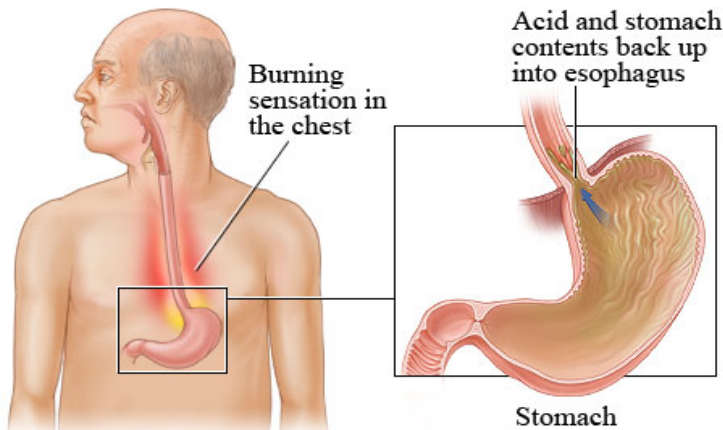


Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD) Information

What is Gastroesophageal Reflux?

Gastroesophageal reflux, or GERD, is the backflow of stomach or intestinal contents, or both, into the esophagus and past the lower esophageal sphincter (LES), without associated belching or vomiting. The LES is a ring of muscle between the esophagus (food pipe) and acts as a valve. When the LES does not close properly, stomach contents can leak back into the esophagus and may cause a burning sensation in the chest (Heartburn). This reflux can occur when the LES pressure is too low or when the stomach exceeds the LES pressure.



What are the signs and symptoms of Reflux?

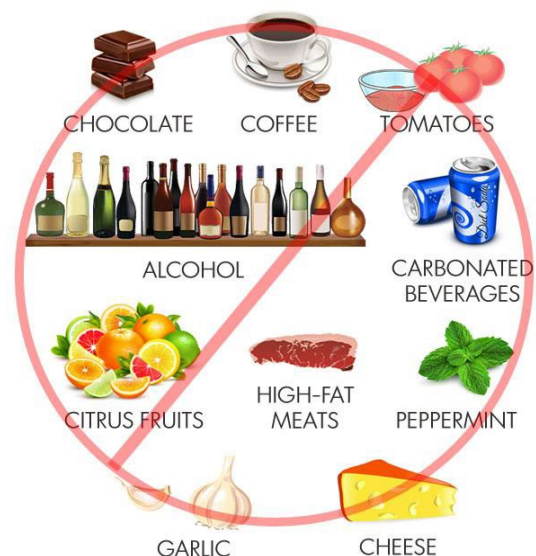
Although GERD doesn't always cause symptoms, the most common feature is heartburn. Symptoms may become more severe with vigorous exercise, bending, or lying down. Antacids or sitting upright may decrease symptoms of reflux.

What may increase reflux symptoms?

Foods: Caffeine (regular coffee, regular tea, chocolate)

- Whole milk
- Foods with high fat content
- Citrus fruits/juices
- Carbonated beverages
- High-dose alcohol
- Mints (peppermint, spearmint)
- Tomato products
- Fried, greasy foods
- Spicy foods
- Garlic and onions

Other: Cigarette smoking
 Unhealthy body weight
 Lying on the left and right side
 Sitting





What may decrease reflux symptoms?

Healthy Proteins
Healthy Carbohydrates
Nonfat milk
Avoid alcohol



How should I control my condition?

- **Lose weight.** Obesity is the leading cause of GERD
- Avoid any circumstance that increases intrabdominal pressure (such as bending, coughing, vigorous exercise, tight clothing, constipation, and obesity) or any substance that reduces sphincter control (LES pressure) See list of “What may increase reflux symptoms?” on front page of this handout.
- Sit upright, particularly after eating meals, and try to eat smaller, more frequent meals.
- Avoid highly seasoned food, acidic juices, alcoholic drinks, bedtime snacks, and foods high in fat.
- Avoid lying down for 2-3 hours after eating. If needed, elevate the head of the bed.
- **Take antacids, as ordered.**
- Chewing gum (avoid peppermint and spearmint) may reduce heartburn. Saliva may lessen the effect of acid.
- **Quit smoking.** (Can cause LES to relax)

If you have any questions, please contact the Heartburn and Hernia Program at Northern Light Surgical Specialists at 207.973.8881.