

**Gastroesophageal reflux**, or heartburn, is a condition in which some of the stomach acid travels backward out of the stomach and into the esophagus (swallowing tube) and throat. Reflux can occur at any time of the day, but is usually worse when sleeping. This is because during sleep, the valve between the stomach and esophagus relaxes, allowing stomach acid to flow backward into the esophagus and throat. Stomach acid is very irritating to the throat and can result in laryngitis, which is inflammation of the larynx or voice box. Gastroesophageal reflux that causes inflammation of the voice box is also known as **laryngopharyngeal reflux**. The best way to control the symptoms caused by gastroesophageal reflux is to control the reflux itself.

Common symptoms of gastroesophageal reflux:

- Burning, sore throat, often worse in the morning
- Bad taste in the mouth
- Frequent throat clearing
- Hoarseness, often worse in the morning
- Increased phlegm or mucous in the throat
- Longstanding, dry cough
- A frequent feeling of choking
- A feeling of a lump or something stuck in the throat

### What can be done to control reflux?

- Take the medicine as prescribed, which can often be found over-the-counter as well. Do not stop taking this medicine without discussing this with your doctor. You may not see results for several weeks. The anti-reflux medications typically do not cause side effects although some people may experience bloating.
- Adjust your diet:
  - Learn to eat more frequent, smaller meals during the day.
  - Do not eat within 2-3 hours before lying down and going to bed.
  - Avoid foods and beverages that increase stomach acid such as alcohol, carbonated beverages, caffeine products, chocolate, tomatoes, citrus juices, and peppermint.
  - Avoid fatty food, spicy and fried foods, and foods high in acid content.
  - Cut down on dairy products, such as milk and cheese.
  - Avoid starches and foods made with white flour, including pasta, white bread, crackers, chips, snack foods, potatoes, and white rice.
  - Drink 6 or more 8 ounce glasses of water each day.
- Do not smoke or use tobacco products.
- Try raising the head of bed 6-8 inches by putting some blocks under the head of your bed.
- Avoid tight fitting clothes, which may cause some reflux problems.
- Exercise regularly.
- Be aware that stress can cause or worsen the reflux problem.
- Do not lift heavy items, exercise, or bend over after eating.
- If overweight, lose enough weight to meet your ideal body weight.

Although it may seem like there are too many things to pay attention to or change about your lifestyle, concentrate on the areas that need the most work, and change additional things if your symptoms continue to be problematic. **Remember, this is a gradual process.** Some of the symptoms caused by reflux took time to develop, which means that it will take time to undo them. If your symptoms continue despite the use of medication and the above lifestyle changes, let your doctor know because further testing and treatment may be indicated. Please contact us with any questions.

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