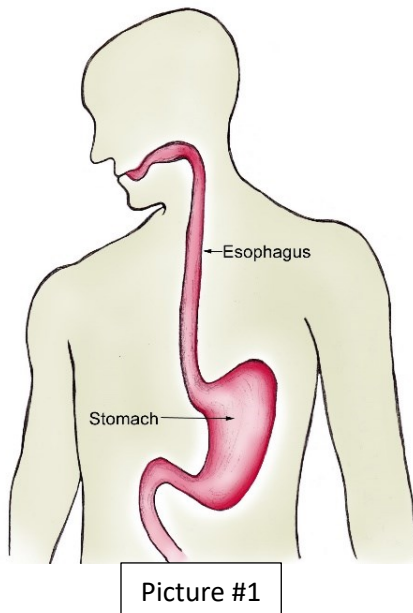


## Managing Heartburn or Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)

This handout offers information on how to manage heartburn/GERD.

### What is Heartburn/GERD?

Heartburn/GERD is when acid normally found in your stomach backs up into your esophagus. The esophagus is the tube that carries food from your mouth to your stomach (see picture #1 below).



When this happens, you may have one or more of these symptoms:

- Burning feeling in your chest
- Bitter or sour taste in your mouth
- Feeling of discomfort in the upper part of your stomach
- Regurgitation of food or fluid into your mouth
- Burping
- Bloating
- Feeling full soon after eating
- Feeling uncomfortable after eating

### What you can do to manage heartburn/GERD

Food choices causing heartburn can be different from person to person. Keep a food diary for 1 week to help you know what food choices cause heartburn/GERD. Stop eating these food choices. Re-introduce these foods into your diet when your symptoms are gone. Use these foods in small amounts and as part of a meal.

It may help to eat less of these food choices:

- Alcohol
- Drinks with caffeine (examples: coffee, tea, colas, energy drinks)
- Citrus fruits and juices
- Chocolate
- Garlic and onions
- Spearmint and peppermint
- Strong spices (examples: chili flakes, cayenne pepper, chili powder)
- Tomato products (examples: tomato juice, tomato sauce)
- Fried and high fat foods (examples: French fries, potato chips)
- Pastries and cakes
- Pop and carbonated drinks

### **What you can do to reduce your symptoms of heartburn/GERD**

- Eat smaller amounts of food more often instead of 2 to 3 big meals in 1 day
- Drink fluids after or in between meals
- Sit in an upright position for 1 hour after a meal
- Eat slowly and chew your food well
- Do not eat for 3 hours before you go to bed
- Raise the head of your bed by 6 to 8 inches (15 to 20 cm) when sleeping (try using a foam wedge)
- Sleep on your left side
- Take a walk after your main meals. This will help your meal digest
- Stop smoking
- Do not wear clothing that is tight across your stomach

Talk to your family doctor or nurse practitioner if your symptoms of heartburn/GERD continue after making these changes. They may decide to prescribe a medication to help lessen your symptoms of heartburn/GERD.

Ask a member of your healthcare team for a referral to a dietitian if you have questions about how to manage your heartburn/GERD.

*This handout was created by the Patient Education Program at the Durham Regional Cancer Centre/Lakeridge Health. It was last reviewed in May of 2024.*