

# Nutrition for Patients with Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)



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## What is GERD?

**Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)** is a digestive problem where stomach acid flows back into the **esophagus** (the tube that food and drink flows through from your mouth to your stomach) or mouth. It can happen when the muscles between your esophagus and stomach become weakened or too relaxed. This can cause symptoms such as:

- Heartburn
- Chest pain
- Nausea
- Coughing

You can learn more about GERD through these online resources:

<a href="http://www.uofmhealth.org/conditions-treatments/digestive-and-liver-health/gerd-gastroesophageal-reflux-disease">www.uofmhealth.org/conditions-treatments/digestive-and-liver-health/gerd-gastroesophageal-reflux-disease</a>	
<a href="http://aboutgerd.org">aboutgerd.org</a>	

## What should I eat or drink to help with GERD?

- Some people find that certain foods or drinks can cause (or “trigger”) GERD symptoms or make them worse. Nutrition therapy, including diet and lifestyle changes, can help some of these symptoms. However, there

is not enough research right now to support one specific diet that is best for GERD.

- There are some foods that may affect the digestive tract and cause symptoms. Your providers may suggest that you limit or avoid eating or drinking these foods.
  - If you stop any of these foods and you don't notice improvement in your symptoms after a few days, then there is no need to continue avoiding them. You can add it back into your diet.
- Remember that each person may have their own food triggers and tolerances. It's best to work with a dietitian or doctor to help you create your own plan to minimize your symptoms.

**Common foods that may cause GERD:**

Peppermint	Spicy food
Tomato products	Onion
Garlic	Black pepper
Fatty or greasy foods (fried foods, pastries, hot dogs, sausage, etc.)	Citrus fruits (orange, grapefruit, or pineapple)
Chocolate	Caffeine (coffee, tea, energy drinks)
Alcohol	Carbonated drinks (soda, seltzer, etc.)

**What other eating and drinking habits can help with GERD?**

- Avoid late-night eating patterns (eating during the 2-3 hours before you go to bed).
- Eat several small meals spread throughout the day.
- Eat in a calm, relaxed place.
- Sit down while you eat.
- Chew your food very well before swallowing.

- Avoid rushing through meals. Take your time while eating (you can think about taking 20-30 minutes to finish a meal).
- Sit in an upright position for 2-3 hours after eating.
- Avoid large, high fat meals.

### **What should I eat and drink to support gut health and digestion?**

- Eat proper amounts of fiber. Read more about fiber in the section below.
- Try not to eat many ultra-processed foods (foods that are changed from their natural forms and made through industrial processing). These foods have many added ingredients and high levels of sugars, salt, and saturated fat. Examples include fast food (burgers, fries, pizza), candy, cookies, pastries, cakes, cake mixes, chicken nuggets, fish sticks, breakfast cereal, and cereal bars.
- Focus on cooking and eating more homemade meals, with minimally processed and whole foods. Some examples include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts and seeds, nut and seed butters, beans, lentils, olive oil, herbs and spices, eggs, poultry, and small amounts of meat.
- Avoid or drink very little alcohol, sugar-sweetened drinks like soda with high fructose corn syrup, or drinks with artificial sweeteners like sucralose.
- Focus on drinking mostly water, unsweetened coffee, and tea.

### **What should I know about fiber?**

- Fiber is a type of carbohydrate found in plants like fruits, vegetables, grains, nuts, seeds, beans, and legumes. Fiber is different from other carbohydrates (like most starches and sugars) because it is not broken down, digested, or absorbed in the upper part of your digestive system. Instead, fiber passes through your stomach and small intestine without being broken down and reaches your colon. In the colon, it can be

digested by gut microbes, and the rest passes out of the body and becomes part of your stool (poop).

- A diet with lots of fiber supports good gut health and helps you have regular bowel movements. You can watch a video from Michigan Medicine about fiber by scanning the QR code.



## What lifestyle changes can help with GERD?

Changing certain habits may improve your GERD symptoms.

- If you experience GERD symptoms at night, elevate (raise) the head of your bed 6-9 inches. You can do this using a wedge pillow.
- Sleep on your left side.
- Wear loose-fitting clothes around your stomach.
- Do not smoke.
- Do some light exercise, such as walking.
- Keep yourself at a healthy weight for you. For some people, having extra body weight in the belly area can put more pressure on your stomach and a special muscle called the **lower esophageal sphincter (or LES)**. This extra pressure makes it easier for stomach acid to come back up into your throat, which can cause acid reflux.
- Try chewing non-mint gum (or you can use mint gum if it doesn't bother you). Chewing gum makes you produce more saliva (spit), and this can reduce the amount of acid in your esophagus.

If you have any other questions about GERD, or other questions about diet and nutrition, please schedule an appointment with your doctor or dietitian.

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