

How to Treat Severe Heartburn (GERD)

What is GERD?

Gastroesophageal reflux disease (or GERD, for short) is a very common condition. People with GERD often have heartburn, and stomach contents can leak back into your throat. People with GERD may also have nausea and chest or belly pain.

How is it treated?

Your doctor will probably want you to take an acid-reducing medicine for one to two months. You can also try these things:

- Lose weight, if you are overweight
- Stop smoking
- Eat small frequent meals rather than several large meals daily
- Raise the head of your bed by six inches if you have symptoms at night
- Avoid eating two hours before bedtime if you have symptoms at night

Can medicines for GERD cause other problems?

Medicines for GERD have been used safely for many years. But they can put you at risk for certain infections. They may also keep your body from absorbing certain vitamins and minerals like magnesium. Talk to your doctor about any concerns you may have.

There are some things you can do to keep these problems from happening. Take the lowest dose of medicine you need to help your heartburn. If your doctor approves, you can also stop taking the medicine from time to time.

What symptoms should I watch out for?

Call your doctor right away if you have any of the following:

- Bleeding during bowel movements or dark tarry stool
- Losing weight without trying
- Trouble swallowing
- Decreased appetite or feeling full sooner than usual
- Continued heartburn while taking the medicine

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

AAFP's Patient Education Resource

<http://familydoctor.org/familydoctor/en/diseases-conditions/heartburn.html>

National Library of Medicine

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/heartburn.html>
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/gerd.html>

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This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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