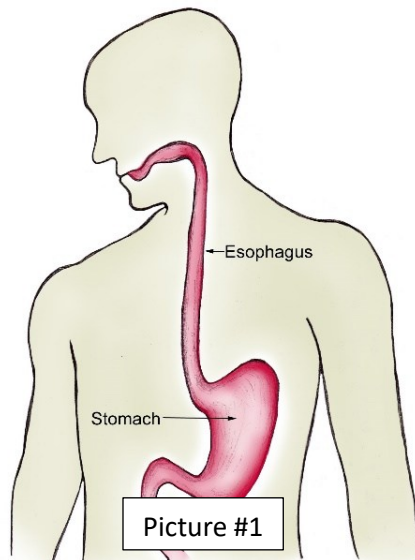


Managing Heartburn or Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)

This handout offers information on how you can 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. This is when food or fluids come back up from your stomach and 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 you to have heartburn/GERD. Stop eating these food choices. Re-introduce these foods into your diet after your symptoms of heartburn/GERD are gone. Use these foods in small amounts and as part of a meal.

It may help to eat less of these food choices as they are known to cause heartburn/GERD for many people:

- 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 between meals instead of during your meals.
- Do not lie down for at least 1 hour after you eat a meal.
- Do not eat for 3 hours before you go to bed.
- Eat slowly and chew your food well.
- Raise the head of your bed by 6 to 8 inches (15 to 20 cm) when sleeping (try using a foam wedge or extra pillow).
- Sleep on your left side. Your stomach is positioned slightly to the left. Studies show that if any stomach acid escapes into your esophagus, it clears and returns to your stomach much faster when you sleep on your left side compared to lying on your back or on your right 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 June of 2026.