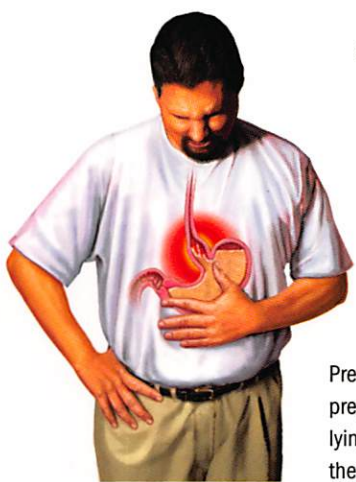


MANAGING YOUR GASTROESOPHAGEAL REFLUX DISEASE (GERD)



Symptoms of GERD include:

- Acid, sour taste in mouth
- Bloating stomach and belching
- Pain in throat and chest
- Hoarseness, coughing

Pressure from being overweight, pregnant, having a hiatal hernia, or lying down after a meal can cause the LES muscle to open.

What Is Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)?

GERD (acid reflux disease) occurs when stomach acid flows up into the esophagus (the tube connecting the mouth with the stomach). The stomach can handle stomach acid, but the throat and esophagus can't. As a result, stomach acid in these areas may cause damage. To some extent, everyone has acid reflux. Normal reflux usually happens after meals, is brief and without symptoms, and rarely happens during sleep. Normal reflux becomes GERD when symptoms occur frequently (generally at least two or three times a week) or the esophagus becomes damaged.

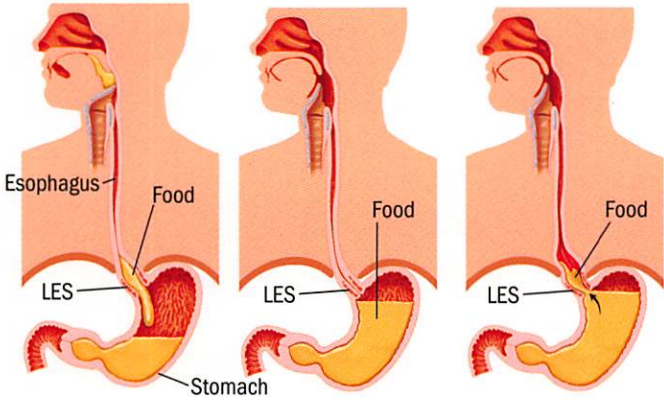
What Are the Causes of GERD?

Abnormalities of the lower esophageal sphincter (LES), a muscle at the bottom of the esophagus, cause GERD. Other causes include hiatal hernias and other pressures on the stomach, such as pregnancy. A hiatal hernia is the bulging of the upper part of the stomach into the chest through an enlarged opening in the diaphragm (the sheet of muscle separating the bottom of the ribcage from the abdomen).

Food passing normally from esophagus to stomach

LES muscles functioning properly; food remains in stomach

LES muscles not working properly; food refluxes into esophagus



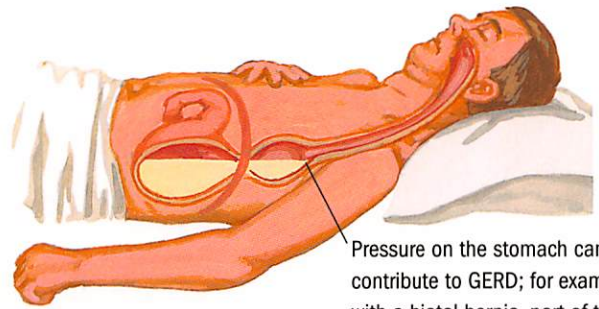
If the LES does not function properly, the contents of the stomach may return upward into the esophagus. The stomach contents contain acid, and they irritate the sensitive lining of the esophagus.

What Are the Symptoms of GERD?

The most common symptom is heartburn, a burning feeling in the middle of the chest. It sometimes spreads to the throat. An acid taste may occur. Heartburn affects about 10 million adults in the United States daily. Other symptoms include chronic cough, hoarseness, upset stomach, stomach bloating, and wheezing. More serious symptoms are bleeding, weight loss, and difficulty swallowing.

How Is GERD Diagnosed?

The doctor relies on symptoms and the response to treatment for diagnosis. Life-threatening diseases, such as heart disease, that can cause symptoms similar to those of GERD must be ruled out. Specific tests are needed for an unclear diagnosis or more serious symptoms. These tests may include upper GI (gastrointestinal) x-ray series, endoscopy (using a scope to look at your esophagus and stomach directly), 24-hour esophageal pH study (measurement of acidity), and esophageal manometry (measures esophageal muscle pressure).



Pressure on the stomach can contribute to GERD; for example, with a hiatal hernia, part of the stomach protrudes into chest, increasing acid reflux.