

Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD) +/- Hiatal Hernia

Lifestyle & Dietary Treatments

The goal of treatment of GERD is to reduce reflux and prevent damage to the esophagus caused by acid coming back out of the stomach. Usually a combination of lifestyle/dietary changes and medication (proton pump inhibitors such as Pantoprazole) which decrease the amount of acid made by the stomach, are successful in eliminating the pain and symptoms caused by GERD.

We would recommend the following dietary and lifestyle changes:

Dietary Changes

- Limit foods that set off reflux. Common “trigger foods” differ from person to person, so we encourage using a food diary (tracking what you eat compared with your symptoms) to determine what the worst trigger are for you. The most common trigger foods are:
 - Chocolate
 - Acidic foods: lemon, orange, tomato-based foods, orange juice
 - Caffeine – we recommend limiting yourself to one caffeinated beverage per day
 - Alcohol – limiting to 1 drink maximum per day, and ideally cutting it out
 - Fried foods
 - Peppermint
 - Spicy foods
 - Carbonated beverages

Other Lifestyle Changes

In addition to avoiding dietary triggers, we recommend the following lifestyle changes:

- Avoid lying down for at least two hours after a meal or after drinking acidic beverages, like soda, or other caffeinated beverages. This can help to prevent stomach contents from flowing back into the esophagus due to gravity. In the evening, the best way to prevent nighttime reflux that wakes you up from sleep is to not eat or drink for 4 hours before going to bed.

- Keep your head elevated while you sleep. Using an extra pillow or two can also help to prevent reflux for the same reasons.
- Eat smaller and more frequent meals each day instead of a few large meals (6 small meals instead of 3 large ones). This promotes digestion and can aid in preventing heartburn because your stomach only empties at a certain rate and eating too much in one sitting promotes reflux if the stomach is too full.
- Wear loose-fitting clothes to ease pressure on the stomach, which can worsen heartburn and reflux.
- Quit smoking. Smoking can increase the production of stomach acid and reduce the function of the lower esophageal sphincter, the muscle that keeps acid and other stomach content from re-entering the esophagus. Smoking can also decrease the amount of saliva, which neutralizes acid produced by the body. See our smoking cessation resources to get you started, or speak to your family doctor for more information on stop smoking pharmaceutical aids.
- Reduce excess weight around the midsection. This can ease pressure on the stomach. Such pressure can force some stomach contents back up the esophagus.

If these measures don't work and you are on a proton pump inhibitor twice a day, we would recommend you have an endoscopy (camera test into the stomach) to guide next steps of treatment. There is a surgery which is an option for some patients to help with their symptoms, but you would need a few tests to ensure you are a good candidate before making a referral to a surgeon at the Ottawa Hospital who specializes in anti-reflux surgery.

Please ask us for more information about this surgical option if it interests you.