

HEALTH TIPS

Consejos de Salud



My Chest and Throat Are Burning!

It is Friday night. Pedro, Juan, and Fernando are grilling some steaks at Pedro's house. They are celebrating a birthday. Everybody brought something to share... guacamole, tortilla chips, salsa, beer, sodas, cheeses and cake. Pedro was really careful with what he ate, but Juan and Fernando ate everything they could. While drinking coffee after dinner, Juan, Fernando and Pedro had an interesting conversation:

Juan: Hey, do you guys ever get like a pain in your chest and burning feeling in your throat? I have that right now...

Fernando: Yes, that happens to me a lot after I eat... I take those medicines called Tums or Rolaids. They help me a little bit, but after a while, the pain in my chest and the sour taste in the back of my throat comes back.

Pedro: That was me a year ago. I used to have that problem every time I ate. I do not eat as much anymore and I stay away from certain foods. I also take a medicine when I need it.

Fernando: Really? Why?



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Pedro: Well, at first this problem would happen only one or two times each week. But after a while, it started happening more often. The medicines were not helping either. One night after a big dinner, the burning got really bad and I felt pain in my chest. I was up all night. The next day I saw my doctor. He told me I had acid reflux. This is when the acids from your stomach come up towards your throat. This usually happens after you eat and it gets worse when you eat spicy or greasy foods. So the doctor gave me a medicine and asked me to change some of my eating habits. Now by changing the food I eat and taking my medicine, I am getting better.

Juan: Well, I don't get it all the time... only when I drink and eat a lot. It goes away after a little while. It doesn't bother me that much.

Pedro: Juan, it may not seem like a big deal, but if you get it more than a couple of times a week, you should see a doctor. My doctor told me that after getting acid reflux a lot, eating can become really hard and painful. Then, you might even need surgery. This is why I started doing the things my doctor recommended.

Fernando: I think I should go see the doctor. I don't just feel burning in my chest and throat. I also cough a lot and sometimes throw up. I even feel a lump in my throat when I eat.

Pedro: The doctor told me that could mean your acid reflux is getting worse. There is no reason for anyone to live like that. Go talk to your doctor!

Fernando: Yes, Pedro. I am glad you shared your story with us. It is time for me to do something about it and I will!

Juan: Me too... Thanks, Pedro!





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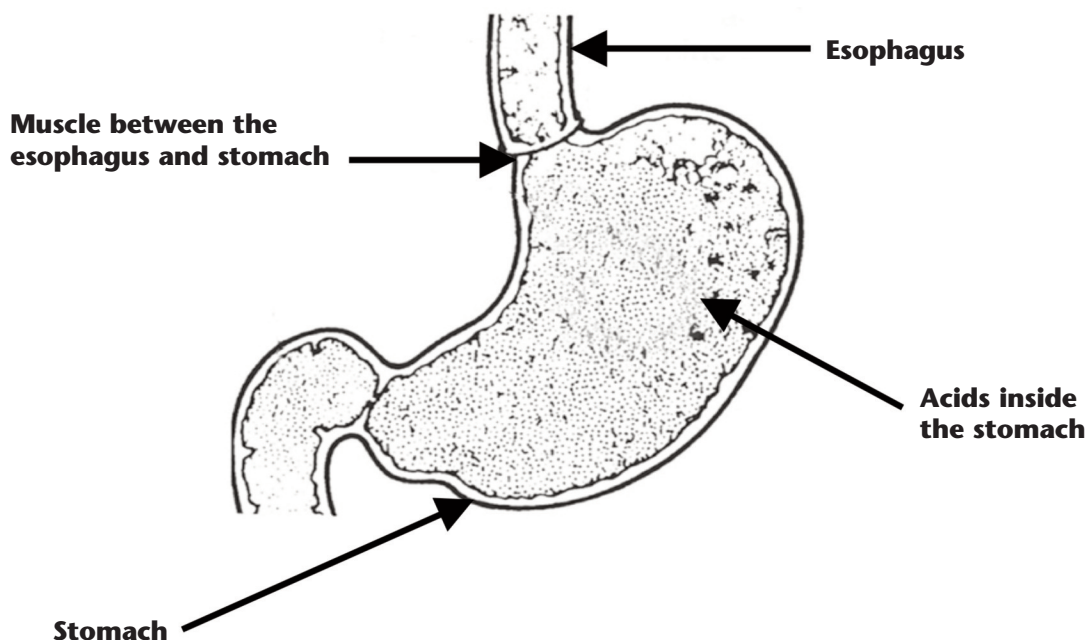


What You Should Know about Acid Reflux

Have you ever felt a burning feeling that starts in your chest and moves up towards your throat? Do you also get a sour taste in your mouth or throat? Does it happen more often after you eat a heavy or spicy meal, or after drinking alcohol? If you answered yes, then it could mean you have acid reflux. Let's learn more about it!

What is acid reflux?

Acid reflux happens when the muscle that connects the esophagus and the stomach does not work well (see picture below). The esophagus is the tube that connects the throat to the stomach. The muscle at the bottom of the esophagus opens when food is on its way to the stomach and closes right after.



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If this muscle does not work well, the acids from the stomach can move up into the esophagus and towards the throat. This causes acid reflux. The muscle may not work well because it becomes weak or relaxed. This usually happens if you:

- smoke regularly,
- take some medicines to treat allergies, asthma, high blood pressure, pain or depression,
- are overweight or obese, or
- are pregnant.

Can acid reflux affect my health?

If acid reflux happens only once in a while, it is not too much of a problem. But if it happens more than 2 times a week for a few weeks or months, and if it does not get better when you take medicines, then you may have something called Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD). Acid reflux that happens often is what causes GERD and it is a condition that lasts a long time.

When GERD is not treated, you may get:

- lung problems like asthma or pneumonia,
- swelling in the esophagus that makes it hard and painful to swallow food, or
- cancer of the esophagus.

When should I see a doctor?

You should see a doctor if you have acid reflux often, and it does not get better with medicines you can buy without a prescription or with changes in your food.

How do doctors treat GERD?

It depends on how strong your symptoms are. Your doctor may tell you to make lifestyle changes, like adding exercise or changing what you eat. Your doctor may also prescribe some medicines. If your condition is more serious, or gets worse, your doctor may also recommend surgery.



Call your doctor right away if:

- You vomit a large amount
- Your vomit comes with force
- Your vomit looks green or yellow
- Your vomit looks like ground coffee
- Your vomit has blood in it
- You have problems breathing after vomiting
- You have problems when you swallow

The images in this article were provided by the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, NIH.



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What You Can Do about Acid Reflux

"You can control mild acid reflux if you make some changes in your daily routine," says Marina Rubio, nutritionist at San Jose Health Center. Here are some of Marina's tips to deal with mild acid reflux at home. She also shares a list of medicines doctors use to treat more severe cases of acid reflux.

Marina recommends...



Small portions

1. Watch or change your eating habits

- Eat smaller meals. Try eating four to five small meals instead of two or three large ones.
 - Wait at least three hours after eating before lying down.
 - Wait about two hours after eating before exercising.
 - Wear loose clothes if you are overweight.
 - Chew your food very well before swallowing.
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2. Watch what you eat and drink

- Avoid acidic foods like tomatoes, oranges and grapefruits.
 - Avoid drinks that contain alcohol or caffeine like wine, beer, coffee, chocolate, soda, and tea.
 - Stay away from foods high in fat like fried chicken, pizza, or a big steak. Also avoid cheese, nuts and avocados.
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3. Try different medicines to reduce your symptoms

If you have acid reflux every now and then you may be able to control it by taking a type of medicine called antacids. Marina explains that antacids like Maalox, Mylanta, Roloids and Tums, help you feel better right away, but only for a few hours. You do not need a doctor's prescription to buy these medicines.

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If antacids DO NOT help you feel better, then you can use medicines that help lower the amount of acids in your stomach. You can get these medicines as generics or brand-name. Some examples are:

Generic	Brand name
Cimetidine.....	Tagamet OTC
Nizatidine.....	Axid AR
Famotidine.....	Pepcid AC
Ranitidine.....	Zantac 75, Zantac 150

These medicines begin working within an hour and you will feel well for up to 12 hours. You do not need a doctor's prescription to buy these medicines either.



If your symptoms do not get better with these medicines, you should get checked by a doctor to make sure you do not have GERD or something else. In case you have GERD, the doctor may recommend a different type of medicine, like:

Generic	Brand name
Omeprazole OTC.....	Prilosec OTC
Lansoprazole OTC.....	Prevacid OTC

NOTE: You do not need a prescription to buy these medicines, but you should talk with your doctor before taking them. These medicines treat the symptoms of GERD but do not cure it and they can have some serious side effects.



In the United States, "generic" medicines are just as good as brand-name medicines. They are very safe and cost a lot less money.



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What Is this Pain?

One day Renata was knitting at home. She was not feeling well. She felt a lot of pressure on her chest, but she did not pay attention to it. After a while, the pressure turned into pain. It kept getting worse. Finally, she called her doctor, and he told her to go straight to the emergency room.

At the hospital, they ran different tests. In the end, they told her she was not having a heart attack. The problem was that her esophagus was swollen and bleeding in some areas. Renata was suffering from GERD.

Renata's experience is more common than you think. Chest pain can be a sign of a heart problem, but it can also be a sign of a different health problem, such as GERD. There are some ways you can tell the difference, so let's learn about it:

Look at the type of pain

GERD

- You feel a burning feeling right below your breastbone or ribs.
- This burning feeling could move up your throat.

Heart

- You feel the pain in the center of your chest. It is sudden and severe.
- The pain might spread to your arms, shoulders, or neck.

Check for other symptoms

GERD

- You may have a sour taste in the back of your mouth.

Heart

- You may have cold sweats, nausea, shortness of breath, and fast heartbeats.
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Think about what you were doing when the pain started

GERD

- The pain may start 30 to 45 minutes after you eat a big meal, especially if you lie down right after that.
- It may also happen if you eat greasy, acidic or spicy foods.

Heart

- The pain often starts after exercise.
- It may happen when you are feeling a lot of stress.

Does the pain get better with medicine?

GERD

- The pain gets better by taking antacids.

Heart

- The pain does NOT get better with antacids. It only gets better by taking medicine for your heart.



Caution!

There are always exceptions:

If you have chest pain that is mild or that goes away when you rest, see a doctor as soon as possible.

If you have severe chest pain and you aren't sure what's causing it, go to the emergency room.