

GERD (Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease)

GERD, also known as acid reflux, is an acronym that stands for gastroesophageal reflux disease. It is a chronic illness that affects 5-7% of the world population and is associated with serious medical complications if untreated. GERD is the 3rd most common gastrointestinal disorder in the U.S. GERD affects people of all ages, ethnicities and cultures and tends to run in families.

People who experience night time heartburn are more likely to report having symptoms of sleep problems/disorders such as insomnia, sleep apnea, daytime sleepiness and restless legs syndrome.

GERD is described a backflow of acid from the stomach into the esophagus. Most patients with GERD experience an increase in the severity of symptoms (usually heartburn or coughing and choking) while sleeping or attempting to sleep. If the acid backs up as far as the throat, the sleeper will wake up coughing and choking.

Factors that may contribute to GERD include:

- age
- smoking
- alcohol use
- diet
- obesity
- pregnancy

Also, certain foods can be associated with reflux events, including:

- citrus fruits
- garlic and onions
- spicy foods
- chocolate
- drinks with caffeine
- fatty and fried foods
- mint
- tomato-based foods, like spaghetti sauce and pizza

The most frequently reported symptoms of GERD are:

- Heartburn
- Acid regurgitation
- Inflammation of the gums
- Erosion of the enamel of the teeth
- Belching
- Chronic sore throat

Treatment includes behavioural modifications, medications, surgery, or a combination of methods. Over-the-counter medications may provide temporary relief but will not prevent symptoms from recurring.

The lifestyle changes to minimize GERD include avoiding fats, onions, chocolate and alcohol. Losing weight may also help alleviate GERD symptoms. Because of the association between GERD and sleep apnea, people with night time GERD symptoms should be screening for sleep apnea.