

Tips to Help Prevent Acid Reflux

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DENVER — Gastroesophageal reflux disease, commonly referred to as GERD or acid reflux, is a condition in which the liquid content of the stomach regurgitates (backs up or refluxes) into the esophagus giving the feeling of heartburn. Everybody has some reflux. Abnormal amounts of gastroesophageal reflux can cause gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD). This occurs when the valve of smooth muscle between the esophagus and the stomach does not function properly. Dr. Luette Morton offers the following tips to help prevent reflux:

Limit your intake of acid-stimulating foods and beverages. Limit citrus and tomato products, strong spices, caffeinated drinks, carbonated drinks, fatty foods, chocolate, mint, and alcohol.

Eat smaller, more frequent meals. A full stomach can put extra pressure on the lower esophageal sphincter (LES), which will increase the chance that some of this food will reflux into the esophagus.

Don't eat within two to three hours before bedtime. Lying down with a full stomach can cause stomach contents to press harder against the LES, increasing the chances of refluxed food.

Elevate your head a few inches while you sleep. Lying down flat presses the stomach's contents against the LES. With the head higher than the stomach, gravity helps reduce this pressure. You can elevate your head in a couple of ways. You can place bricks, blocks, or anything that's sturdy securely under the legs at the head of your bed. You can also use a wedge-shaped pillow to elevate your head.

Maintain a reasonable weight. Obesity increases abdominal pressure, which can then push stomach contents up into the esophagus. According to some statistics, approximately 35% of overweight persons experience heartburn.

Don't wear belts or clothes that are tight fitting around the waist. Clothing that fits tightly around the abdomen will squeeze the stomach, forcing food up against the LES and causing food to reflux into the esophagus. Clothing that can cause problems include tight-fitting belts and slenderizing undergarments.

Don't smoke. Nicotine relaxes the esophageal sphincter. Smoking also stimulates the production of stomach acid.

Relax. While stress hasn't been linked directly to heartburn, it is known that it can lead to behaviors that can trigger heartburn.

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Media Contacts

Our team is available to arrange interviews, discuss events and story ideas.

William Allstetter
303.398.1002
allstetterw@njhealth.org

Adam Dormuth
303.398.1082
dormutha@njhealth.org