

# UAB Health Education

## STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES

### ACID REFLUX



Acid reflux is also known as gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD). It is typically caused by backflow of acid from the stomach into the esophagus. Most commonly, GERD causes heartburn (a burning sensation in the chest). Long-standing untreated GERD can lead to serious health complications from continued damage to the esophagus.

#### DIAGNOSIS

Generally based on symptoms, physical exam, and response to treatment. If you do not improve with certain lifestyle modifications and medications, further tests may be ordered including:

- X-ray with contrast as you swallow to allow better visualization of your upper digestive system (mouth, throat, esophagus, stomach)
- pH probe test which is a small tube inserted down your nose into your throat to measure the acid in your stomach over 24 hours
- Endoscopy is a test in which your doctor inserts a camera into the esophagus and stomach to look for damage to the inner lining. This is generally reserved for people with “alarm symptoms” such as weight loss, difficulty or pain with swallowing, bloody vomiting, or dark and tarry stools.

#### TREATMENT

- **Antacids:** calcium carbonate (Tums), bismuth subsalicylate (Maalox), aluminum hydroxide/magnesium hydroxide/simethicone (Mylanta)- quickly and briefly neutralize stomach acid
- **H2 blockers:** ranitidine (Zantac), famotidine (Pepcid), cimetidine (Tagamet)- quickly reduce the production of stomach acid
- **Proton Pump Inhibitors (PPI):** omeprazole (Prilosec), esomeprazole (Nexium), pantoprazole (Protonix)- decrease production of stomach acid, more effective for moderate to severe symptoms

#### CALL STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES IF

- You have difficulty or pain with swallowing
- Unexplained weight loss
- Vomiting blood or dark stools

#### RESOURCES

**FamilyDoctor.org** <https://familydoctor.org/condition/refluxacid-reflux/>

**Mayo Clinic** <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/gerd/symptoms-causes/syc-20361940>

**NIH** <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/digestive-diseases/acid-reflux-gerd-gerd-adults/definition-facts>

#### SYMPTOMS

- Heartburn
- Pain in upper abdomen or chest
- Regurgitation of food/fluid
- Acid taste in mouth
- Burping, coughing, sore throat

#### RISK FACTORS

- Obesity
- Alcohol use
- Pregnancy
- Smoking
- Hiatal Hernia

#### PREVENTION

Symptoms can be prevented with lifestyle modifications, including:

- Maintain a healthy weight
- Avoid wearing tight clothing
- If you have nighttime symptoms, elevate the head of the bed to allow gravity to help reduce reflux
- Avoid large or late meals, especially within three hours of bedtime
- Avoid food triggers such as caffeine, chocolate, fatty, greasy, or spicy foods, or carbonated beverages
- Stop smoking, decrease alcohol intake