



University of North Carolina Wilmington
Abrons Student Health Center

INSTRUCTION SHEET: GERD (HEARTBURN)

The Student Health Provider has treated you today for GERD (Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease). Other names for this problem are heartburn and reflux esophagitis. GERD, or heartburn, does not involve the heart. Instead, GERD is caused by irritation of the lining of the esophagus, the tube leading from the mouth to the stomach. The irritation results from the backflow of acid from the stomach into the esophagus.

Symptoms of GERD include discomfort and fullness in the middle of the chest. The discomfort often starts in the middle of the upper abdomen and pushes up into the chest. Burping, with stomach contents being pushed up into the mouth, and difficulty swallowing can also occur with GERD.

Factors which often make GERD worse include overeating, improper diet, obesity, smoking, and drinking alcohol.

MEASURES YOU SHOULD TAKE TO HELP TREAT GERD:

1. Avoid food and drinks that make your symptoms worse. Alcohol, fatty/greasy foods, chocolate, peppermint, and caffeine drinks (coffee, colas, tea) are common irritants.
2. Eat smaller, more frequent meals. Avoid large meals at a single sitting.
3. Elevate the head of your bed about six inches with wood or blocks. This will put your head and esophagus higher than your stomach, helping to keep acid from flowing back into the esophagus.
4. Do not eat for two to three hours before bedtime. Do not drink for one hour prior to going to bed.
5. If you smoke, stop. Minimize or stop all alcohol consumption. Lose weight if you are overweight.
6. For mild symptoms, liquid antacid may be enough to provide relief. The usual dose is 1 tablespoon, taken 1 hour after meals and at bedtime.
7. The provider may prescribe or recommend other over-the-counter medicine for you. If so, take the medication as directed.
8. Acetaminophen (Tylenol and others) is a safe over-the-counter medicine to take for pain. Aspirin, naproxen, and ibuprofen may further irritate the stomach and esophagus.
9. If your condition worsens, seek medical care *promptly*. For severe pain accompanied by symptoms such as nausea, pain down the arm, sweating, shortness of breath, and cold/clammy skin, call 911. Seek prompt care, as well, for increasing pain, repeated vomiting, blood in the vomit, or black tarry stools (a possible sign of blood in the stool).
10. Make a follow-up appointment as directed. Your provider can provide ongoing care, recommend further evaluation if needed, and help prevent future episodes.