

**For Immediate Release**  
**Nov. 24, 2014**



Media Contact: Anne Brownsey  
(630) 570-5635  
[abrownsey@asge.org](mailto:abrownsey@asge.org)

**American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy**  
3300 Woodcreek Drive  
Downers Grove, IL 60515

P (630) 573-0600  
F (630) 963-8332  
[www.asge.org](http://www.asge.org)  
[www.screen4coloncancer.org](http://www.screen4coloncancer.org)

---

## **KNOW THE FACTS ABOUT GERD**

*GERD Awareness Week is Nov. 23-29; learn the facts about diet and lifestyle changes that can help reduce GERD symptoms*

**DOWNERS GROVE, Ill., Nov. 24, 2014** – National GERD Awareness Week is November 23-29, and the American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (ASGE) urges individuals who suffer from gastroesophageal reflux disease, or GERD, to learn about how diet and lifestyle changes can positively impact symptoms and when it is appropriate to seek medical diagnosis and treatment. Here are a few things to know about GERD.

### **What is GERD?**

Gastroesophageal reflux is a chronic disease that occurs when stomach contents flow back (reflux) into the food pipe (esophagus). It is usually caused by failure of the muscle valve (called the lower esophageal sphincter) between the stomach and the esophagus to close properly. The backwash of stomach acid irritates the lining of the lower esophagus and causes the symptom of heartburn.

### **What are the symptoms of GERD?**

Common symptoms of gastroesophageal reflux disease are heartburn and/or acid regurgitation. Heartburn is a burning sensation felt behind the breast bone that occurs when stomach contents irritate the normal lining of the esophagus. Acid regurgitation is the sensation of stomach fluid coming up through the chest and sometimes into the mouth. Less common symptoms that may also be associated with gastroesophageal reflux include unexplained chest pain, wheezing, sore throat and cough, among others. If the GERD is severe, you might experience trouble swallowing which is a symptom that should be evaluated by a gastroenterologist.

### **Is there a specific diet that will help with symptoms of GERD?**

There is no specific diet that will prevent all symptoms of GERD. One way to identify reflux-related “trigger” foods is through a food diary. Writing down the foods you eat, the time of day and any symptoms may help you recognize triggers so that you can change your diet and hopefully reduce symptoms.

### **What are some known trigger foods?**

Some foods are known to trigger symptoms of GERD. By keeping a food diary, you can identify your trigger foods and change your diet to reduce discomfort. Below is a list of some foods recognized to trigger symptoms of GERD and how they affect the digestive tract:

- Coffee (with or without caffeine) and caffeinated beverages relax the lower esophageal sphincter.

- Citrus fruits and juices such as orange, grapefruit and pineapple have high acid content.
- Tomatoes and processed tomato-based products such as tomato juice, and pasta and pizza sauces are highly acidic.
- Carbonated beverages (fizzy drinks) cause gaseous distension of the stomach (bloating) which increases pressure on the lower esophageal sphincter causing acid reflux.
- Chocolate contains a chemical called methylxanthine from the cocoa tree, which is similar to caffeine. It relaxes the lower esophageal sphincter, which causes acid reflux.
- Peppermint, garlic and onions relax the lower esophageal sphincter causing acid reflux.
- Fatty, spicy or fried foods relax the lower esophageal sphincter as well as delay stomach emptying and therefore cause acid reflux.

### **What is recommended to improve symptoms of GERD?**

The following lifestyle changes may help to reduce symptoms of GERD:

- Don't lie down after a meal. Wait at least three hours after eating before going to bed.
- Maintain a healthy weight. If you are overweight or obese, work with your health care provider to achieve a healthy weight.
- Avoid tight fitting clothes.
- Avoid foods and drinks that trigger the symptoms.
- Eat smaller meals.
- Avoid smoking.
- If you have nighttime reflux symptoms, elevate the head of your bed approximately six to eight inches by placing wooden blocks under the legs of the head of the bed or by inserting a wedge between the mattress and box spring. Extra pillows under your head will not reduce reflux symptoms at night.

### **What makes GERD symptoms worse?**

- Smoking and smokeless tobacco reduce the amount of saliva in the mouth and throat, which is then not available to counteract refluxing stomach acid. The nicotine in tobacco may cause coughing and can relax the lower esophageal sphincter, thus allowing frequent episodes of acid reflux.
- Alcohol consumption in some individuals may directly irritate the lining of the esophagus, relax the lower esophageal sphincter and delay the emptying of the stomach, thus promoting acid reflux.
- Excess weight gain and tight fitting clothes will increase pressure in the abdomen and encourage stomach contents, including acid, to reflux into the esophagus.
- Pregnancy increases pressure in the abdomen and encourages stomach contents, including acid, to reflux into the esophagus. Female hormones also relax the lower esophageal sphincter thus promoting acid reflux.
- Certain medical conditions such as diabetes mellitus, delayed stomach emptying, asthma, connective tissue disorders like scleroderma, and Zollinger-Ellison syndrome can worsen GERD.
- Medications for the following conditions may worsen GERD symptoms:
  - High blood pressure
  - Asthma
  - Parkinson's disease
  - Birth control pills
  - Depression
  - Motion sickness

**When to contact a doctor:**

Contact your health care provider if symptoms do not improve with diet and lifestyle changes or if you develop alarm symptoms such as bleeding, weight loss or difficulty swallowing. Initial treatment may start with over-the-counter (OTC) medications that control stomach acid. For more information on GERD and to find a gastroenterologist in your area, log on to the ASGE's website at [www.asge.org](http://www.asge.org).

*Editor's note: For an accompanying infographic on diet and GERD, [click here](#).*

###

**About the American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy**

Since its founding in 1941, the American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (ASGE) has been dedicated to advancing patient care and digestive health by promoting excellence in gastrointestinal endoscopy. ASGE, with more than 13,000 members worldwide, promotes the highest standards for endoscopic training and practice, fosters endoscopic research, recognizes distinguished contributions to endoscopy, and is the foremost resource for endoscopic education. Visit [www.asge.org](http://www.asge.org) and [www.screen4coloncancer.org](http://www.screen4coloncancer.org) for more information and to find a qualified doctor in your area.

**About Endoscopy**

Endoscopy is performed by specially-trained physicians called endoscopists using the most current technology to diagnose and treat diseases of the gastrointestinal tract. Using flexible, thin tubes called endoscopes, endoscopists are able to access the human digestive tract without incisions via natural orifices. Endoscopes are designed with high-intensity lighting and fitted with precision devices that allow viewing and treatment of the gastrointestinal system.