

GERD

Symptoms of GERD

Most people with GERD have no symptoms. But if reflux (acid backup) occurs, you may notice the following:

- Heartburn or other chest discomfort
- Frequent burping
- Acid taste in the mouth
- Problems swallowing
- Nighttime choking, coughing, or wheezing

Discovering GERD

Often GERD is found during an exam or tests for another health problem. An evaluation for hiatal hernia is usually needed only if symptoms bother you.

Diagnostic Tests

- An upper GI barium x-ray can show whether there is a hiatal hernia. It can also show how severe a hiatal hernia is.
- Endoscopy (EGD) helps your doctor see if there is any irritation of the esophagus.
- Esophageal manometry measures the pressure of the LES.
- A 24-hour acid (pH) monitoring test measures the reflux coming into the esophagus.

Treatment

If you have symptoms from GERD, the goal is to help you feel better. Here are some suggestions:

- Lose excess weight. Excess weight puts pressure on the stomach and esophagus.
- Avoid LES relaxers. Some things may relax the LES and cause reflux. Avoid cigarettes, alcohol, fatty foods, chocolate, and coffee.
- Avoid anything that causes symptoms. If a particular food or drink gives you problems, stay away from it. There are also many medications that may cause symptoms, consult your doctor about medications that you are taking.
- Try acid-reducing medications. Over-the-counter antacids may help relieve heartburn. Your doctor may have prescription solutions that can help also.
- Surgery is rarely needed. Surgery is usually needed only for severe, uncontrolled symptoms.

Anatomy of the stomach and esophagus

The esophagus is a muscular tube that links the throat to the stomach. At the bottom of the esophagus is the **lower esophageal sphincter (LES)**. The LES acts as a valve. It passes through an opening (hiatus) in the diaphragm. The diaphragm is a sheet of muscle between the chest and abdomen.

The LES is normally tight to keep food and digestive acids down in the stomach. If the LES is loose, part of the stomach may bulge above the diaphragm. This bulge is called a hernia

