





Knowledge is the key to living a healthier lifestyle, and the digestive health experts at Cooper University Health Care are eager to provide you with the information you need to stay healthy and feel your best.

Acid reflux, more formally known as gastroesophageal reflux disease, or GERD, is a common digestive health concern. When left untreated, however, GERD can lead to serious health complications, so it's important to understand what to do when acid reflux won't go away.

This guide will introduce you to the symptoms of GERD, the risk factors, and the treatment options available at Cooper.



#### WHAT IS GERD?

Before discussing the treatment options for GERD, it's important to understand how this digestive disorder may affect your life on a day-to-day basis.

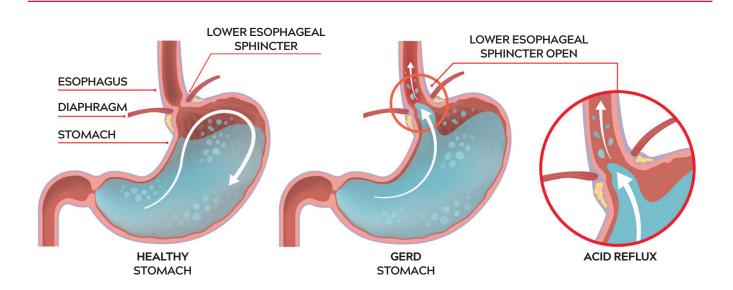
Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) is a disorder in which stomach acid flows upward into the esophagus, the tube that connects your mouth and stomach. Typically, the lower esophageal sphincter muscle opens when food or drink is ingested, allowing it to travel into your stomach, and the muscle then closes again. GERD can occur when the lower esophageal sphincter is relaxed or weakened, allowing a backwash of stomach acid into the esophagus.

While many people experience acid reflux from time to time, especially after a large meal, individuals who suffer from mild episodes at least twice a week, or moderate-to-severe episodes at least once a week, are likely to have GERD.

#### What You Should Look Out For

Symptoms of GERD commonly occur after eating or when lying in bed at night. Symptoms include:

- · A burning sensation in the chest
- · Discomfort in the chest
- · Regurgitation of food or hot or sour liquid
- Sensation of a lump in your throat
- Difficulty swallowing
- Asthma
- Disrupted sleep
- Chronic cough



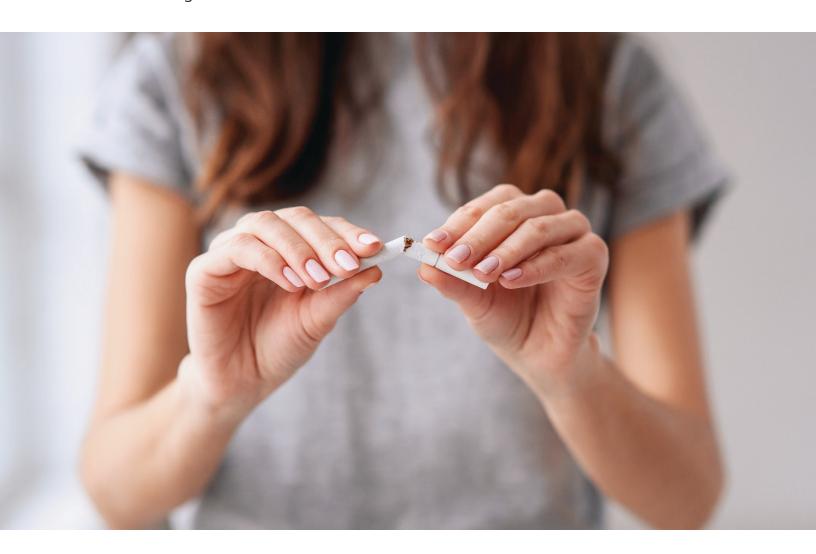


# **RISK FACTORS AND COMPLICATIONS OF GERD**

Various risk factors can increase your likelihood of developing GERD or may aggravate your acid reflux disease.

A few of the most common risk factors include:

- Obesity
- Hiatal hernia (the upper part of the stomach bulges through the large muscle separating the abdomen and chest)
- Pregnancy
- · Connective tissue disorders such as scleroderma
- Certain medications, including blood pressure medications, opioids, and oral contraceptives
- Smoking







# LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF UNRESOLVED GERD

The immediate discomfort caused by GERD can make daily life unpleasant and affect your overall routine at work and home. Unresolved GERD can also negatively affect your overall health and may result in serious complications.

Over time, the rising stomach acid can begin to damage the lower esophagus, causing scar tissue to form. As scar tissue builds, the opening of the esophageal tube shrinks, resulting in difficulty swallowing.

Sometimes chronic inflammation may cause sores to develop in the esophagus, also making it hard to swallow – and causing persistent discomfort.

Another long-term effect of untreated GERD is **Barrett's esophagus**, a precancerous condition in which the cells lining the esophagus begin to change over time. Eventually, these precancerous cells, which are called dysplasia, can lead to esophageal cancer.

Esophageal cancer is often caught in the late stages of its development, making it especially difficult to manage. Treatments are available, but cures are rare, increasing the need to identify precancerous cells early, before they have the chance to develop.



## MANAGING GERD IN YOUR DAILY LIFE

Lifestyle modifications – healthy eating, smoking cessation, and regular physical activity – can alleviate the symptoms of GERD.

Losing weight can help with GERD, especially when trimming down the weight you carry around your stomach.

The more fat that you carry in your midsection, the more pressure is placed on your abdomen, which in turn can push gastric juices up into your esophagus. By losing weight, you'll reduce the pressure applied to your abdomen.

You may also benefit from wearing loose-fitting clothes that don't constrict the stomach. The less pressure on your stomach, the less discomfort you'll feel.







## CHANGE YOUR DIET TO RELIEVE DISCOMFORT

Watching your diet is one way that you can reduce the effects of acid reflux. There are many do's and don'ts when it comes to a diet for men and women with GERD. The table below shows which foods to avoid and which foods to incorporate into your diet.

GERD DIET DO'S	GERD DIET DON'TS
Bananas	Caffeine or carbonated beverages
Melons	Fatty foods
Oatmeal	Spicy foods
Yogurt	Chocolate
Green vegetables	Mints
Lean meats	Citrus fruit and juices

Alcohol (beer, wine, and liquor) may also increase symptoms of GERD and cause damage to the esophagus. Physicians recommend that individuals with GERD avoid alcohol – or moderate their consumption.

The food you choose to eat is only part of the battle. It's important to control the portion size of your meals too. The less you have in your stomach, the harder it will be for stomach acids to begin rising into your esophagus.

After you eat, try to avoid lying down for at least two hours. Gravity will help you combat GERD symptoms by restricting the upward movement of stomach acid. Lying down or taking a nap, however, negates this benefit and allows stomach acid to flow into the esophagus more easily. When you sleep, prop your head up about six or eight inches higher than your body to use the pull of gravity to aid in healthy digestion.



#### WHAT ARE YOUR TREATMENT OPTIONS?

#### **Options: Medication**

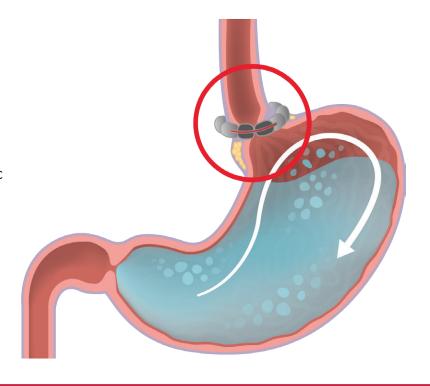
A wide range of over-the-counter and prescription medications are available today to treat GERD. Often **antacids** (such as Tums, Alka-Seltzer, and Gaviscon) are the first recommendation, as they naturally work to relieve heartburn and diminish some of the symptoms common with GERD.

Two other medication options available are H2 blockers and proton pump inhibitors (PPIs). Both medications work by blocking and decreasing the production of stomach acid. PPIs (such as Prilosec, Prevacid, and Protonix) are considered the strongest in reducing stomach acids, and H2 receptor blockers (such as Pepcid, Tagamet, and Zantac) are another class of medications often used to relieve heartburn in the evening.

## **Options: Surgery**

Surgery is another option for managing GERD. If your specialist determines that surgery is the right option for you, **fundoplication** is a common choice that can lead to long-term relief from acid reflux. During this surgery, the top of the stomach is wrapped around the lower esophagus. This provides support for the lower esophageal sphincter muscle, allowing it to close tightly and prevent stomach acid from flowing into the esophagus. This surgery usually requires a one-day to three-day stay in the hospital. Typically patients can resume their normal daily activities within two to three weeks.

The alternative surgery option is called the LINX system. This surgical procedure involves attaching a small, flexible band of interlinked titanium beads with magnetic cores around the base of the lower esophageal sphincter muscle, where the esophageal tube meets the stomach. Magnetic attraction keeps the beads closed tightly around the esophagus. Swallowing will temporarily break the magnetic bond, allowing food and liquids to pass through into the stomach. This way your food can be digested successfully, but nothing can come back up and cause discomfort.





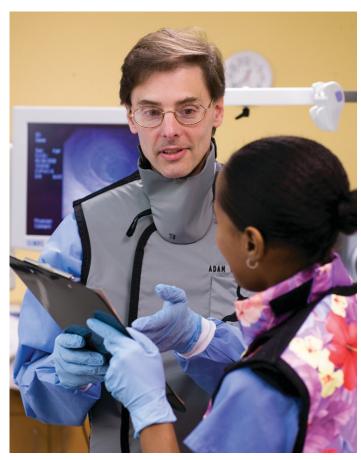
# WHY CHOOSE COOPER'S DIGESTIVE HEALTH INSTITUTE?

If you have heartburn symptoms more than twice a week or have been treated with prescription medications without relief, it's time to schedule an appointment with a gastroenterologist.

A gastroenterologist can provide the expert care needed to manage your GERD. The Cooper Digestive Health team offers a full range of services, from general GI health and routine screenings to complex GI problems, including cancer. Our team of 14 nationally recognized gastroenterologists offers a level of expertise and clinical excellence that is unmatched in South Jersey.

Some of the unique advantages of choosing Cooper:

- Advanced diagnostic and treatment technologies offered only at an academic medical center
- Convenient outpatient locations throughout South Jersey
- State-of-the-art endoscopy centers in Camden, Mount Laurel, and Willingboro accredited by the American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy
- Gastroenterologists on staff at MD Anderson Cancer Center at Cooper who provide a multifaceted team approach to cancer care and treatment
- An exceptional patient experience at all Cooper Digestive Health Institute locations



Adam B. Elfant, MD, FACG Head, Division of Gastroenterology and Liver Diseases

Patients who choose Cooper's digestive health experts are under the care of an entire team of specialists who will develop a personalized care plan to best meet each patient's needs.



#### **COOPER GASTROENTEROLOGISTS**



## STAYING ONE STEP AHEAD OF GERD

It's important to be proactive in managing your digestive health to avoid serious complications and enjoy a good quality of life. The digestive health experts at Cooper are here to help. We have multiple offices located throughout Camden, Gloucester, Burlington, and Salem counties.

To schedule an appointment with a Cooper gastroenterologist, call 800.8.COOPER (800.826.6737).

