



Let Nutrition Help You Manage Acid Reflux



Acid reflux or gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) is a digestive disorder affecting over 18 million people annually in the United States alone. Acid reflux occurs when the valve separating the stomach from the esophagus called the lower esophageal sphincter (LES), fails to stay closed properly. As a result, stomach contents go back up into the esophagus, and even up to the

mouth. An increased number of transient LES relaxations impair gastro esophageal motility resulting in acidification of the esophagus. This and low esophageal clearance are considered to be the most important factors in GERD pathogenesis. During an episode of acid reflux, you might feel a burning sensation in your chest (heartburn). Other signs and symptoms can include regurgitation of food or sour liquid, difficulty swallowing, dry cough, sore throat, burping, wheezing, and chest pain — especially while lying down at night.

If you have occasional acid reflux, lifestyle changes can help. These include losing excess weight, eating smaller meals, not eating within two to three hours of bedtime, raise the head of your bed, and avoiding foods that can trigger heartburn. These food include—

- High fat foods such as fried foods and cream sauces
- Chocolate, coffee, peppermint, citrus fruits, and tomatoes
- Alcohol, carbonated beverages

To identify your individual triggers, keep a food diary.

Prolonged exposure to stomach fluids, -bile, pancreatic enzymes and stomach juices-can damage the esophagus, the throat and even the vocal cords, resulting in hoarseness or more serious problems. The corrosive effect of stomach acids may also cause abnormal cells to form in the esophageal lining, a condition called Barrett' s esophagus, a precursor to esophageal cancer.

Listed below are some specific nutrients that can help manage symptoms of acid reflux.

Fiber



Low resting pressure of LES is associated with an increased number of reflux episodes of longer duration. Research has shown a fiber-enriched diet significantly improves LES resting pressure and decreases the number of gastro-esophageal refluxes and heartburn frequency.



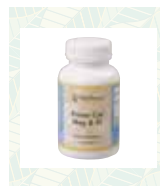
Protein

A low-fat and high-protein diet is superior to medication for acid reflux management. Less fat requires less bile and acid for digestion and faster digestion time. Moreover, lean proteins, such as chicken, turkey, fish and sea food, low-fat dairy products, and soy products can ensure adequate protein intake. Early studies indicated that protein increases the LES pressure thereby allowing the closure of the sphincter and the reduction of reflux. Also, maintaining a diet of adequate low-fat protein helps in the healing of irritated mucosa or ulcers.

Digestive enzymes, ginger and curcumin



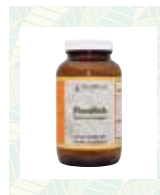
Supplementing with digestive enzymes and ginger extract can regulate the flow of liquid in the GI tract to promote the digestion process and absorption of food. Ginger extract can also tighten the LES to prevent backflow of stomach contents. Curcumin has been shown to effectively prevent the esophageal mucosal damage induced by acute, mixed, acid-bile reflux. This protective mechanism caused by curcumin in the esophagus has been attributed to the antioxidant nature of this turmeric derivative.



Calcium

Calcium tightens the LES valve. However, swallowing a calcium pill does not prevent reflux well because the calcium is not instantly dissolved. The calcium must be chewed or swallowed as a powder or liquid, in order to be available in solution at the lower esophagus, where it prevents reflux without decreasing stomach acid.

Healthy bacteria



Reflux symptoms are commonly perpetuated by gut dysbiosis or *small intestinal bacterial overgrowth* (SIBO). In the case of SIBO, bacteria relocate from the large intestine to the small intestine inappropriately, where they then ferment carbohydrates. Both the fermentation and bacterial presence in the small intestine can lead to several physiological changes including decreased gastric motility, prolonged relaxation of the LES, and increased intra-abdominal pressure. Taking antacid drugs will disturb the gut bacteria balance, and make gut dysbiosis even worse. If you need to take antacid medication to manage your acid reflux symptoms, probiotics could help keep your gut bacteria balanced and healthy, and also help to decrease stomach distension.