

Patient Handout: Lifestyle Modifications and Nutrition Tips for GERD

What Is GERD?

GERD stands for gastroesophageal reflux disease, a condition in which contents of the stomach frequently flow back into the esophagus. This often causes symptoms of radiating chest pain, indigestion, and acid reflux.

What Causes GERD?

The root cause is typically a weakened lower esophageal sphincter. How you eat, and what you eat, matters and can help prevent acid reflux episodes.

How You Eat Matters

- Avoid late meals and snacks; eat more than three hours before you go to bed. (If you go to bed at 9 PM, eat dinner or snacks no later than 6 PM).
- Eat small meals throughout the day, and avoid eating the largest meal at the end of the day.
- Eat slowly and until you are full; honor your hunger cues.

What You Eat Matters

- Avoid any trigger foods you have identified. Common triggers are spicy, acidic, or carbonated items. For example, if you notice that eating tomato sauce exacerbates symptoms, avoid it if possible and substitute something less acidic.
- Eat a predominantly plant-based or Mediterranean diet based on whole foods such as fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, and seeds.

Other Lifestyle Modifications to Consider

- Develop a good sleep pattern. Go to bed and wake at consistent times, create a sleep-promoting environment, avoid screen time close to bed, and eliminate potential light or noise disturbances.
- Raise the head of your bed with blocks. The blocks should be at least 28 cm to achieve the optimal angle. Avoid lying flat and laying down right after you eat.
- Consider losing weight, especially if you have a BMI greater than 30. See an RD to help you lose weight effectively and efficiently.
- Identify emotional and physical stressors and try to implement lifestyle changes to reduce them.