

# GERD: MORE THAN JUST HEARTBURN

## Frequently Asked Questions



### What is GERD?

GERD stands for gastroesophageal reflux disease. With GERD, stomach contents (food or liquid) leak backwards from the stomach into the esophagus (the tube from the mouth to the stomach). This action can irritate the esophagus, causing heartburn and other symptoms.

### What are the symptoms?

Common symptoms of GERD include chronic heartburn or burning pain in the chest, and regurgitation. Less common symptoms include chronic cough, sore throat, and hoarse voice.

### Who is at risk?

The risk factors for GERD include obesity, hiatal hernia, smoking, pregnancy, scleroderma, and excessive alcohol consumption.<sup>1,2</sup>

### How many people have GERD?

GERD affects up to 40% of the U.S. population in their lifetime.<sup>3</sup>

### How is GERD diagnosed?

Your doctor may be able to diagnose GERD from your description of symptoms, but may also suggest tests to evaluate your condition and determine the best treatment plan.

The three main tests used when GERD is suspected or known are esophageal pH monitoring, endoscopy, and manometry. With pH monitoring, your doctor measures the amount of acid in your esophagus over a 24- to 48-hour period. Endoscopy uses a flexible tube with a light and video camera on the end to visualize the esophagus, and manometry assesses the function necessary for proper swallowing.

### Are treatment options available?

GERD can be treated with lifestyle changes, such as avoiding foods that trigger the disease. Prescription and over-the-counter medicines, like proton pump inhibitors, can lower the amount of acid released in your stomach. For patients who do not respond to lifestyle changes and medication, anti-reflux procedures may also be an option.

### What happens if GERD goes untreated?

One of the most significant risks of GERD is that it can lead to Barrett's esophagus, a precancerous disease where composition of the tissue lining the lower esophagus changes. If untreated, Barrett's esophagus may progress to esophageal cancer. Esophageal cancer may not be curable depending on the stage at diagnosis and, once diagnosed, just 18% of patients live for five or more years.<sup>4</sup>

### For more information about GERD, visit [learnaboutgerd.com](http://learnaboutgerd.com)

**References:** 1. Diseases and Conditions—GERD: Risk factors. Mayo Clinic. Available from: <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/gerd/basics/risk-factors/con-20025201>. 2. MacGill M. Acid Reflux: Causes, Symptoms and Treatments. *Medicine News Today*. 2015 July (updated 2015 July 22). Available from: <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/146619.php#causes>. 3. Vaezi M, Zehrai A, Yuksel E. Testing for refractory gastroesophageal reflux disease. *ASGE Leading Edge*. 2012;2(2):1-13. American Society Gastroenterology Endoscopy, Pages 1-4. 4. SEER Cancer Statistics Factsheets: Esophageal Cancer. National Cancer Institute. Bethesda, MD. <<http://seer.cancer.gov/statfacts/html/esoph.html>> Accessed December 2015.

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