



Heartburn/Reflux/GER – Older Kids/Teens

Definition and Symptoms

Heartburn (aka reflux or gastroesophageal reflux (GER)) is reflux of stomach contents up out of the stomach and into the esophagus. Symptoms can often be described as “burning in the chest,” increased burping or feeling of bloating after meals, or feeling a “sour taste come up into the mouth.”

Why does this happen?

In infants, the lower esophageal sphincter (the ring of muscle at the top of the stomach) is immature and instead of tightening to keep the food in the stomach, it opens at the wrong time allowing stomach contents to move back or reflux into the esophagus. In older children, the sphincter is matured, so the symptoms are more commonly caused by diet. Certain foods or drinks can cause the lower esophageal sphincter to relax and can delay the digestion process; these make reflux symptoms worse.

Symptom prevention and treatment

- **Foods/drinks to avoid:** If they can't be avoided, eating/drinking in moderation is helpful. In general, try to avoid eating anything for 2 hours before bedtime.
 - Fast foods or Fried foods
 - Tomato based products (tomato sauce)
 - Processed snacks like potato chips
 - Fatty meats like bacon or sausage
 - Spices such as pepper, chili powder, peppermint
 - Pizza
 - Cheese
 - Chocolate
 - Citrus fruits and juices
 - Carbonated and caffeinated beverages
- **Foods that help prevent reflux:**
 - Whole grains (oatmeal, brown rice)
 - Root vegetables (sweet potatoes, carrots, beets)
 - Watery foods: lettuce, cucumber, celery, watermelon, broth based soups
 - Green vegetables: broccoli, green beans, asparagus)
 - Low acid foods: nuts, bananas, cauliflower, melon
- **Home remedies to alleviate symptoms:**
 - Low-fat/non-fat milk or low-fat yogurt can act as a buffer between the acid in the stomach and the stomach lining.
 - Ginger in the form of ginger tea can help ease irritation in the digestive tract.
 - Mixing a small amount of lemon in warm water with honey can help neutralize stomach acid
- **Medication:** We always recommend dietary changes before trying medication.
 - When symptoms are intermittent, over the counter medication can be tried when symptoms arise. These medications could include:
 - **Antacid** (calcium carbonate) found in Pepto Kids Chewables *OR* **Antacid and Anti-gas** (calcium carbonate and simethicone) found in Alka-Seltzer Kids or Children's Mylicon Multisystem Relief Antacid/Antigas). Ages **2 and up**. Dose will be listed on the bottle.
 - **Histamine 2 blocker** (Generic: famotidine, Brand: Pepcid) Ages **12 and up**. If recommended, dose is: _____
 - If medications are needed more frequently or symptoms arise more often, consult with your provider who may recommend a daily medication or referral to a gastroenterologist.

Call If...

- You think your child needs to be seen
- Your child becomes worse or symptoms are not slowly improving