

# GERD / Acid Reflux / Heartburn 101

Natural ways to alleviate acid reflux through simple lifestyle changes

## Wait—Are These All The Same Thing?

Great question! These terms get thrown around interchangeably, but they're slightly different:

### **Acid Reflux**

The physical process of stomach acid flowing backward into your esophagus. It's what's actually happening inside your body.

### **Heartburn**

The burning sensation you feel in your chest when acid reflux happens. It's the symptom—how you experience acid reflux. (And no, it has nothing to do with your heart!)

### **GERD (Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease)**

When acid reflux becomes chronic—happening frequently (typically 2+ times per week). It's the diagnosis when occasional reflux becomes an ongoing pattern.

### **Excessive Burping**

Often goes hand-in-hand with reflux. When you eat too much, too fast, or too many fatty foods, your stomach produces extra gas trying to break it all down. That gas has to go somewhere—usually up. It's your body's way of relieving pressure from an overloaded digestive system.

Think of it this way: Acid reflux is the action, heartburn is what you feel, GERD is when it becomes chronic, and excessive burping is your body releasing pressure. The good news? The lifestyle solutions are the same for all of them.

## What's Actually Going On?

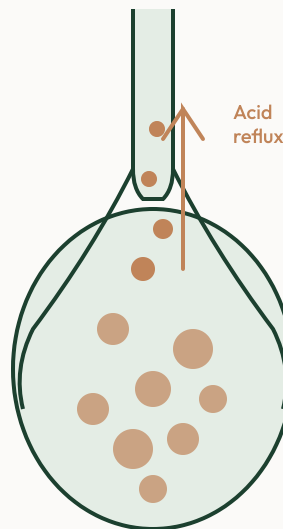
Let's talk about what's really happening when you get that burning sensation in your chest. Acid reflux occurs when stomach acid flows back up into your esophagus—the tube that connects your throat to your stomach. It's not fun. It can feel like fire in your chest, a lump in your throat, or even make you feel like you're having a heart attack (but don't worry, it's not!).

But here's what most people don't realize: **These conditions are usually lifestyle issues, not medication deficiencies.** Your body is giving you a signal that something in your daily habits needs to change.

The most common culprits? Eating too much, eating too fast, eating too late, eating too much fatty or fried food, and then lying down before your body has had a chance to digest. When your stomach is stuffed beyond capacity, there's only one place for that food to go—back up.

**The good news? Most people can significantly reduce or even eliminate their symptoms with simple lifestyle changes. No medications needed.**

## Why It Happens



When you overeat, your stomach gets packed beyond its natural capacity. The pressure builds, and the lower esophageal sphincter (the valve between your esophagus and stomach) can't hold everything down.

Result? Food and stomach acid push back up into your esophagus, causing that burning sensation, discomfort, and sometimes even regurgitation.

Lying down after eating makes this even worse—gravity can no longer help keep food down.

## Common Triggers



### Overeating

Eating too much in one sitting



### Fatty Foods

Fried, greasy, or heavy meals



### Late Night Eating

Eating too close to bedtime



### Eating Too Fast

Not chewing thoroughly

*Other triggers include: alcohol, caffeine, spicy foods, citrus, and stress*

## "But Fruit Gives Me Heartburn!"

Here's something that surprises a lot of people: **fruits and vegetables are almost never the actual cause of your acid reflux.** So why do so many people swear that an apple or a salad sets them off?

It comes down to digestion timing. Fruits and vegetables digest much faster than heavier foods like meat, bread, or fatty meals. When you eat a heavy meal and then follow it with fruit or veggies, those fast-digesting foods hit a traffic jam—your stomach is still working on breaking down the slower stuff from before.

When that fast-digesting food sits on top of the slow-digesting food, waiting its turn, it can ferment and cause irritation. The result? That familiar burning sensation. But the fruit didn't cause it—**the undigested food from your previous meal did.**



### The Simple Fix: Eat Fruits & Veggies First

Instead of saving your salad or fruit for the end of a meal (or eating it as a snack right after a heavy meal), flip the order:

1. Start your meal with fruits or vegetables
2. Give them a few minutes to start moving through
3. Then slowly eat your protein and heavier foods

*This way, the fast-digesting foods clear out first, and everything moves through in order. No traffic jam, no irritation, no heartburn.*

## 👉 Lifestyle Changes That Actually Work

### 👉 Smaller Portions

Your stomach is about the size of your fist. When you stuff it beyond capacity, there's nowhere for that food to go but up. Start with smaller plates, eat until you're 80% full, and give your body time to register that you've eaten.

### 🕒 Eat Slowly & Chew Well

It takes about 20 minutes for your brain to get the signal that you're full. If you're inhaling your food, you'll blow past that fullness cue and overeat before you even realize it. Put your fork down between bites. Chew each bite 20–30 times. Actually taste your food.

### 💧 Stay Hydrated

Drinking water throughout the day (not just at meals) helps digestion move smoothly. Aim for half your body weight in ounces. Just don't chug a ton right before or during meals—sip instead.

### 🌙 Stop Eating 3 Hours Before Bed

When you eat and immediately lie down, gravity can't help keep food in your stomach. Give your body at least 3 hours to digest before hitting the pillow. If you need a snack, keep it light and stay upright for a bit.

## 👉 Movement: Your Secret Weapon

Exercise is one of the most underrated remedies for GERD. When you move, you literally help move food through your digestive system. A simple 15–20 minute walk after meals can make a huge difference. Beyond aiding digestion, regular exercise helps you maintain a healthy weight—and excess weight around your midsection puts extra pressure on your stomach, making reflux more likely.

### DAILY WALKING

A gentle walk after meals helps gravity and movement work together to keep food moving in the right direction. Aim for 15–30 minutes of walking daily—especially after your largest meal.

### STRENGTH TRAINING

Building muscle increases your metabolism, helping your body process food more efficiently. More muscle = faster digestion = less time for food to sit and cause problems. Aim for 2–3 strength sessions per week.

### Timing Matters

Avoid intense exercise right after eating—wait at least 1–2 hours. High-intensity workouts on a full stomach can actually worsen reflux symptoms.

## Your GERD Relief Checklist

### Daily Habits:

- ✓ Eat smaller, more frequent meals
- ✓ Chew each bite 20–30 times
- ✓ Put fork down between bites
- ✓ Drink water throughout the day
- ✓ Take a walk after meals

### Avoid:

- ✗ Eating within 3 hours of bedtime
- ✗ Large portion sizes
- ✗ Eating while distracted
- ✗ Lying down after meals
- ✗ Tight clothing after eating