

Reflux Esophagitis

What is reflux esophagitis?

Reflux esophagitis is inflammation of the lower part of the esophagus. The esophagus is the tube that connects the throat and stomach. This problem causes heartburn and pain in the area below the breastbone.

How does it occur?

Reflux esophagitis is caused by gastroesophageal reflux, which is when the acid contents of the stomach flow back, or reflux, into your esophagus, causing heartburn. Your esophagus may become inflamed if the reflux of acid happens often.

Reflux esophagitis can occur with:

- obesity
- pregnancy
- hiatal hernia
- recurrent vomiting
- scleroderma
- nasogastric tubes.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms can appear when you lie down after eating and are relieved when you sit upright. They include:

- heartburn
- cramping, severe pain, or pressure below the breastbone
- pain
- spitting up at night
- coughing
- shortness of breath
- fluid or vomit inhaled into the lungs.

Heartburn, the most common symptom, usually occurs 30 to 60 minutes after you eat and may be severe. The pain may spread to your neck, jaw, arms, and back.

How is it diagnosed?

The doctor will review your symptoms and examine you, and may order the following tests:

- x-ray
- endoscopy (using a viewing scope to look in the esophagus)
- esophageal manometry (a test to measure pressure in the esophagus).

How is it treated?

The doctor may prescribe:

- antacids to take after meals and at bedtime
- medicine to decrease production of acid in the stomach
- medicine to help food and acid move forward through the digestive tract.

When your esophagus narrows from repeated inflammation and scarring, the doctor may:

- dilate your esophagus
- use surgery to restore and anchor the stomach below the diaphragm
- use bypass surgery to create a new segment of esophagus from a stomach tube.

Surgery is necessary for less than 25% of those with reflux esophagitis.

How long will the effects last?

The duration of symptoms and response to treatment varies from person to person.

How can I take care of myself?

Follow these guidelines:

- Take medications with plenty of liquid. Swallowing medication dry or without enough liquid can irritate the esophagus.
- Avoid drinking alcohol and smoking.
- Avoid eating chocolate, peppermint, fatty foods, citrus foods, caffeine, or tomato products.
- Wear loose-fitting clothes without belts.
- Sleep with the head of your bed elevated at least 4 inches.
- Maintain your proper weight.
- Keep your follow-up appointments with your doctor.
- Let your doctor know if your symptoms get worse.

What can be done to help prevent reflux esophagitis?

Follow these guidelines:

- Avoid stress, especially during meals.
 - Eat frequent, small meals.
 - Avoid smoking.
 - Avoid lying down for at least 3 hours after meals.
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