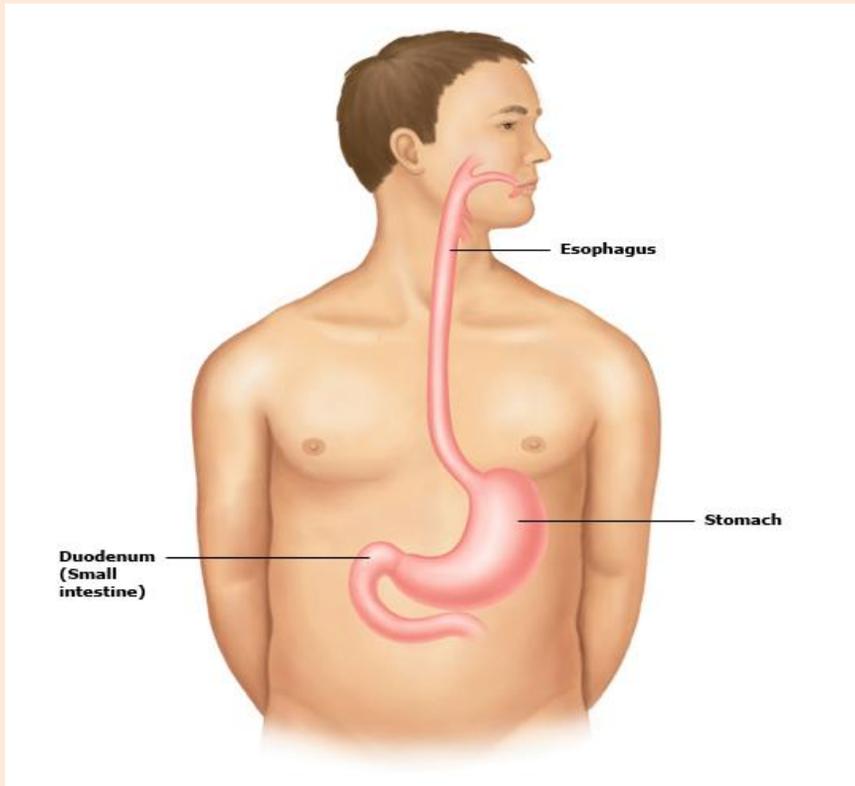


GERD

What is acid reflux? — Acid reflux is when the acid that is normally in your stomach backs up into the tube that carries food from your mouth to your stomach. This tube is called the esophagus. Another term for acid reflux is “gastro esophageal reflux disease,” or GERD.



What are the symptoms of acid reflux? — The symptoms include:

- Burning in the chest, known as heartburn
- Burning in the throat or an acid taste in the throat
- Stomach or chest pain
- Trouble swallowing
- Having a raspy voice or a sore throat
- Unexplained cough

Is there anything I can do on my own to improve my symptoms? — Yes. You might feel better if you:

- Lose weight (if you are overweight)
- Raise the head of your bed by 6 to 8 inches (for example, by putting blocks of wood under 2 legs of the bed or a Styrofoam wedge under the mattress)

- Avoid foods that make your symptoms worse (examples include coffee, chocolate, alcohol, peppermint, and fatty foods)
- Cut down on the amount of alcohol you drink
- Stop smoking, if you smoke
- Eat a bunch of small meals each day, rather than two or three big meals
- Avoid lying down for 3 hours after a meal

What treatments can help with my acid reflux? — There are three main types of medicines that can help with the symptoms of acid reflux: antacids, histamine blockers, and proton pump inhibitors ([table 1](#)). All of these medicines work by reducing or blocking stomach acid. But they each do that in a different way.

You can buy antacids without a prescription. They can relieve mild symptoms, but they work only for a short time. You can also buy most histamine blockers without a prescription. They are stronger and last longer than antacids.

Proton pump inhibitors are the most effective medicines in treating GERD. Two of these medicines are sold without a prescription. But there are other versions that your doctor or nurse can prescribe.

Sometimes acid reflux medicines are less expensive if you get them with a prescription. Other times nonprescription medicines are less expensive. If cost is a concern for you, ask your pharmacist how you might reduce the cost of your medicines.

Should I see a doctor or nurse about my acid reflux? — Some people can manage their acid reflux on their own by changing their habits or taking nonprescription medicines. But you should see a doctor or nurse if:

- Your symptoms are severe or last a long time
- You cannot seem to control your symptoms

You should also see a doctor or nurse **right away** if you:

- Have trouble swallowing, or feel as though food gets “stuck” on the way down
- Lose weight when you are not trying to
- Have chest pain
- Choke when you eat
- Vomit blood or have bowel movements that are black or look like tar