

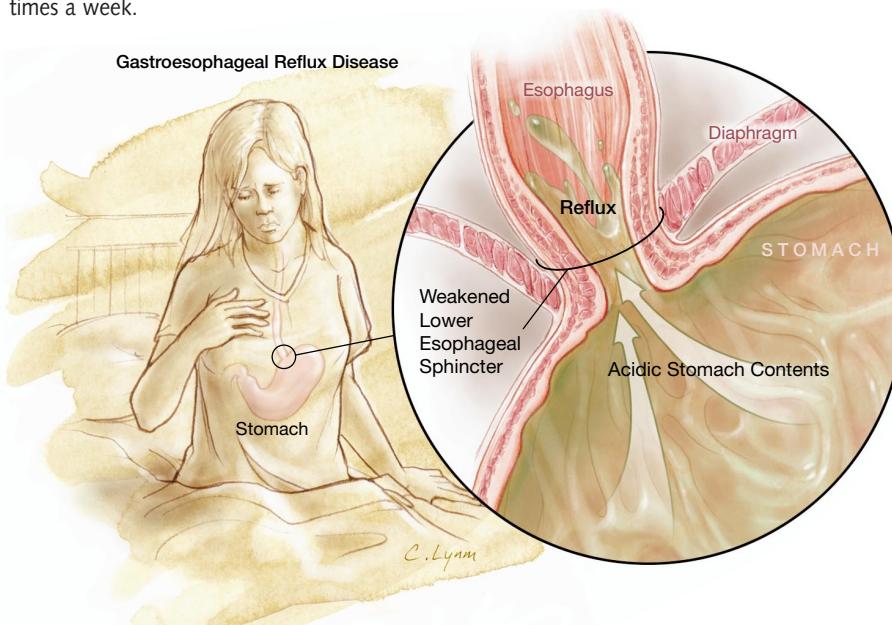
Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease

Many people occasionally experience heartburn, but for some people, it is a frequent or continual problem called **gastroesophageal reflux disease** or GERD.

An article in the May 9, 2001, issue of *JAMA* reports that the majority of people with gastroesophageal reflux disease who participated in the study continue to use medication to control acid reflux years after initial medical treatment or surgery.

WHAT IS GASTROESOPHAGEAL REFLUX?

Gastroesophageal reflux occurs when contents from the stomach, including acidic stomach juices, **reflux** (flow back) into the esophagus, the muscular tube that carries food and liquids down from the throat to the stomach. The most common symptom of gastroesophageal reflux is heartburn (or acid indigestion), a burning sensation in the center of the chest. Symptoms may also include nausea, gagging, cough, or hoarseness. Gastroesophageal reflux disease is characterized by symptoms of acid reflux 2 or more times a week.



THE IMPORTANCE OF RECEIVING TREATMENT

Without treatment, gastroesophageal reflux disease can result in damage to the lining of the esophagus, including inflammation, ulcers, bleeding, and scarring. This damage can also lead to a precancerous condition known as **Barrett esophagus**.

Consult your doctor if you think you may have gastroesophageal reflux disease.

Sources: National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, American College of Gastroenterology, The AMA Home Medical Library, The AMA Family Medical Guide, The AMA Complete Guide to Women's Health, The AMA Encyclopedia of Medicine

Brian Pace, MA, Writer

Cassio Lynn, MA, Illustrator

Richard M. Glass, MD, Editor

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TIPS FOR CONTROLLING ACID REFLUX

- Avoid foods and beverages that affect the lower esophageal sphincter or that irritate the esophagus, such as fatty and fried foods, peppermint, chocolate, alcohol, coffee, citrus fruits, and tomatoes
- Decrease the size of portions at mealtime
- Lose weight, if you are overweight
- Stop smoking or using tobacco products
- Avoid lying down for 2 to 3 hours after eating
- Elevate your head when sleeping or resting
- Take an antacid

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse
Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease
2 Information Way, Bethesda, MD 20892-3570
www.niddk.nih.gov
- American College of Gastroenterology Patient Information
703/820-7400
www.acg.gi.org

INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page Index on JAMA's Web site at www.jama.com. A JAMA Patient Page on gastrointestinal reflux in children was published July 19, 2000.

