

Your Pathway for Managing Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (adults)

What is GERD?

- Acid reflux is when stomach acid moves back up the tube (esophagus) that leads from the stomach to the throat. This can cause a sour taste in your mouth and discomfort or burning pain in your chest or stomach. This is also known as heartburn.
- Occasional heartburn is common.
- When you suffer from heartburn or acid reflux often and for long periods of time.
- Caused by unwanted relaxation of the muscle which normally closes off the esophagus from the stomach.
- Usually cared for by healthcare providers in your family doctor's office.

What is the GERD patient pathway?

It is a map for you and your healthcare providers to follow. It makes sure the care you are getting for GERD is safe and helpful in managing your symptoms.

You and your healthcare providers may modify the pathway to best suit your healthcare needs.

If symptoms cannot be managed over time, you and your healthcare providers may decide a referral to a specialist would be helpful.

1. Check your symptoms

- Heartburn or acid reflux that occurs often and for long periods of time
- Heartburn can feel like burning, warmth, or pain just behind the breastbone or upper stomach area and typically occurs after meals

2. Make lifestyle changes to manage your symptoms (see over for details)

- Identify foods that cause symptoms and try to limit or avoid them
- Eat smaller meals throughout the day
- Lose weight, if you need to
- Stop or reduce the use of tobacco, alcohol, and caffeine
- Wait 2-3 hours after you eat before you lie down

3. Tests that may be done

- Tests are rarely needed
- Blood tests
- Some people who have had GERD for more than 10 years may need a gastroscopy (insertion of a special camera down the throat to look at your stomach in detail)

Tell your healthcare providers if you have these symptoms:

- Family history of cancer in the esophagus or stomach
- Stool that is black in colour or has blood in it
- Trouble swallowing or pain while swallowing food
- Vomiting that doesn't stop
- Vomiting with blood in it
- Losing weight without meaning to
- Lump in the stomach area

Talk to your healthcare providers if your symptoms don't improve, get worse, or keep interfering with your everyday activities

Once you find something that works for you, stick with it.

You may need to keep trying other options to find what works best to manage your symptoms.



4. Medicine that may be tried

- Prescription acid blockers or non-prescription antacids can be used to improve your symptoms
- Talk with your healthcare providers about what medicines may be right for you



What do I need to know about my symptoms and Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease?

Working through the GERD patient pathway can take several months:

- Your healthcare providers will ask you questions about your health and review any medicines you are taking.
- They may suggest certain tests to learn more about possible causes of your symptoms.
- They will talk to you about possible lifestyle habits that may be causing your symptoms and how you can make changes that could help you feel better.
- You may find it helpful to write down your symptoms and what seems to cause them (e.g. certain food or stress). You and your healthcare providers can make a plan to help manage your symptoms using this information.
- Together, you may decide to try certain diet changes and medicines to help treat your symptoms.
- Most people need acid blockers for a short period of time, some may need them for longer.

To manage your symptoms, try to:

- Eat smaller, more frequent meals instead of 2 or 3 large meals.
- Wait 2-3 hours after you eat before you lie down.
- Change what you eat or drink. Fatty foods, spicy foods, foods with a lot of acid in them (e.g. tomatoes, citrus fruit), coffee, mint, and chocolate can be causes of symptoms.
- Stop or reduce the use of alcohol, tobacco, and caffeine.
- Lose weight, if you need to. Losing just 3-5 kg (7-11 lbs) can help.
- Raise the head of your bed 4-6 inches with blocks or foam wedges if you find symptoms occur at bedtime.

Seeing a specialist is only recommended if:

- Your symptoms continue or get worse after following treatment and management options in the GERD pathway.
- You and your healthcare providers identify concerning symptoms or test results.

You can find more information in the great resources below:

- Canadian Digestive Health Foundation cdhf.ca
* search GERD
- Alberta Healthy Living Program ahs.ca/info/page13984.aspx
 - Workshops on chronic pain and stress reduction
- MyHealth.Alberta.ca myhealth.alberta.ca
* search GERD
- Nutrition Education Materials ahs.ca/NutritionResources

Write any notes or questions you may have here:

Please provide feedback about this patient pathway by completing a short [survey](https://bit.ly/DHSCNsurvey) (bit.ly/DHSCNsurvey) or email us at Digestivehealth.SCN@ahs.ca



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