

How to control acid reflux

I'm Lisa Birnbach. We all get a little heartburn now and then, no big deal. But what if you get it a lot? Chronic acid reflux can be a sign of GERD, gastroesophageal reflux disease, which is a painful and sometimes serious disorder. To talk about GERD and how to avoid it is Dr. Jordan Josephson, an ear, nose, and throat specialist in New York, and the author of Sinus Relief Now.

How are you?

I'm fine, how are you?

Good. GERD can be very symptomatic and very problematic for a lot of people. What happens is the acids and the pepsin, the substance that digests steak, that actually refluxes and comes up into your food pipe, and can come up into your throat, and actually drip into your lung, causing asthma to flare up, bronchitis to flare up, hoarseness and throat clearing. [CLEARING THROAT] That kind of sensation.

Right.

Tightness in your throat, and it can actually reflux up into your sinuses, causing exacerbations of sinus problems.

Now, does GERD affect people who are eating too fast? Is there some kind of way to avoid it?

Well, we're not built to eat huge meals. We're actually built to eat small meals throughout the day. So unfortunately, in our fast-paced world, we're not eating breakfast, we're not well hydrated, we're skipping lunch, and we're going home, we're having a huge dinner, and then going to sleep five minutes later, all things that you should not be doing. You should be getting up in the morning, drinking water, staying well hydrated, and have a little bit of food, maybe a banana, maybe a little bit of bread, and then noshing small meals throughout the day, and have a little bit a lunch, and small meals throughout the afternoon. And then for dinner, having dinner and not going to sleep for a couple hours until you digest. Maybe you want to take a walk after you eat a meal, even if it's walking around the office while you're dictating something or talking on the phone, just to get your body moving, so that you're digesting the food, so it's not coming back up.

What about the symptoms of gastroesophageal reflux disease?

Well, the symptoms could be heartburn, a feeling of tightness, or burning, or pressure in your chest. Sometimes the reflux comes up so quick it misses the food pipe, and you end up with a lot of throat clearing, sore throats, coughing, asthmatic flares up, flare ups wheezing, and then if it flares and regurgitates into your sinuses, you may have a current sinus infection as a result.

Can GERD be cured?

Yes, GERD can be cured. There are medical treatments for it. The first and foremost is correcting your diet. And then if that doesn't work, we have different antacids and H2 blockers, they're called, and there are various different agents that you could use to control the stomach from getting upset. And then if that doesn't work, there are actually surgical techniques to take the area between your food pipe and your stomach, which may be prolapsing. You may have heard of a hiatal hernia--

Yeah.

--Which means your stomach comes above your diaphragm, and we have ways of actually pinning it. What they do is they pin the sphincter so that it doesn't allow the food to reflux. Then again, if you're not eating right, you have to get that controlled, as well.

Doctor, what habits might aggravate GERD?

Well, we certainly know that smoking can upset your stomach. Alcohols can upset your stomach. And certainly if you're wearing tight clothing and eating a big meal, that can cause the acids to be pushed up through the diaphragm and into the food pipe. But the bottom line is if you have symptoms, you need to go see specialists. You should get your primary care doctor to talk to maybe a nutritionist, a gastroenterologist, a pulmonologist if your lung's now being affected. If your sinuses and allergies are being affected, a sinus specialist that understands the connection, and maybe an allergist together. They can get together and treat those problems, and treat you as a whole body rather than just one symptom.

And then you have time to go to the office?

Yeah well, it's--

It's a lot of medical management.

It's a lot to do in a short time.

Yeah, it is.

It's probably worth it, because if in a short amount of time they can get you back on track, you have your whole life to live, and you'd rather live it more comfortably.

With a higher quality.

Absolutely.

Thank you so much, Doctor.

Thank you.

I'm Lisa Birnbach.