

HEALTH

Don't Get Burned: Take Control of Your Health

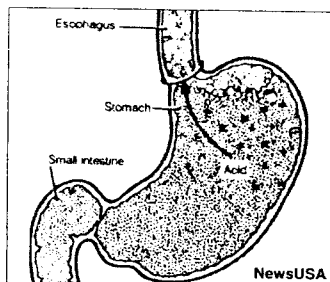
NewsUSA

(NU) - Most people who have eaten a spicy meal have experienced heartburn – but for many, the problem may be much more frequent than the occasional bout of indigestion. Frequent heartburn can also be a symptom of a more serious problem called Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease or GERD. Acid reflux is caused by the regurgitation or reflux of acidic stomach contents into the esophagus, which connects the mouth and stomach. The symptoms of GERD include burning chest pain, regurgitation of bitter or sour liquid, difficulty swallowing and excessive clearing of the throat.

When GERD is not treated, serious complications can occur. If you are constantly reaching for the antacids at the end of the day, the following tips may help:

1. **Don't lie down after eating.** When you lie down, it's easier for stomach acid to back up into the esophagus, particularly when you go to bed with a full stomach. Make sure to wait at least three to four hours after eating before going to bed, and try raising the head of your bed.

2. **Cut out problem foods.** Chocolate, peppermint, tomato sauce and fatty and spicy foods have all been proven to exacerbate the symptoms of heartburn.



If you have heartburn two or more times a week, it could be serious.

Making a point to eat smaller meals will also help curb potential heartburn problems.

3. **Avoid smoking and drinking excessive amounts of alcohol.**

Using tobacco and ingesting alcohol reduces the pressure on the muscle between the esophagus and the stomach, permitting acid reflux to occur.

GERD has a physical cause and may not be improved by lifestyle factors alone. If you are using over-the-counter medications two or more times a week or are still having symptoms on prescription or other medicines, you need to see your doctor. Persistent symptoms of heartburn and acid reflux should not be ignored.

For more information about GERD, visit www.acg.gi.org.