

Gastroesophageal Reflux (GER)

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When your child eats, food goes through the esophagus to reach his stomach. Along the way, it passes through a valve called the lower esophageal sphincter (LES), which is the opening to his stomach. The LES normally opens when he swallows and quickly closes when food enters the stomach.

Gastroesophageal reflux (GER) is a condition that occurs when the LES relaxes at the wrong time or does not close properly, causing food and stomach acid to travel back (reflux) into the esophagus. In babies, regurgitation is the most common symptom of GER. It often improves

gradually when the baby starts to stand up and walk. In most babies, there is usually no cause for concern unless there is associated loss of weight, respiratory symptoms or inflammation of the esophagus.

In older children, GER may be associated with heartburn (a burning sensation of pain behind the sternum) which can last up to 2 hours. It may be accompanied by bouts of coughing, hoarseness, belching and a sour taste in the mouth. You should seek medical advice if your child develops these symptoms.

Watch Out For

The constant reflux of stomach acid can lead to breathing problems, if the stomach contents enter the trachea, lungs or nose. It can also cause inflammation (redness and irritation in the esophagus), ulcer (which can result in pain and bleeding in the esophagus) or stricture (scarring that develops along the esophagus, causing the tube to narrow).

Since these problems can make swallowing painful, GER can cause your child to eat less and interfere with his proper nutrition. So, talk to your doctor if your child has GER and is not gaining weight or is losing weight.

What to Do

If your child has GER, you can try reducing the amount of reflux and potential damage to his esophagus by practising the following:

- Give your child smaller but more frequent meals throughout the day, rather than three large meals.
- Avoid letting your child eat two or three hours before bedtime.
- Avoid giving your child caffeine and spicy, fatty, fried, or acidic foods. Some of the foods to avoid include chocolate, carbonated beverages and cheese.
- Ensure your child maintains an upright position when eating and does not lie down soon after a meal.
- Prevent your child from becoming obese.
- Make sure your child does not wear tight clothing.

