



**UVA Nutrition Services**

**UVA Digestive  
Health Center**

## **Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)**

- ◇ GERD occurs when the muscle between the esophagus and the stomach relaxes or becomes weakened. This allows stomach acid to travel up into the esophagus. This can cause a burning feeling in the chest often referred to as “heartburn.”
- ◇ There are some diets and lifestyle changes that may help relieve the symptoms of GERD, although this varies from person to person. The suggestions listed below may help relieve symptoms in some people, but there is no strong scientific data to support them. Every person is different, so it is important to adjust your diet and lifestyle based on what best helps your symptoms.
- ◇ The one recommendation that does apply to all individuals is:

### **IF A FOOD BOTHERS YOU, DON'T EAT IT!**

- ◇ There are some foods which health professionals frequently recommend that patients with GERD limit (or avoid altogether). Some people with GERD may find that eliminating these foods helps to improve their symptoms. If eliminating these foods does not affect your symptoms, then there is no need to avoid them.
  - § Spicy foods
  - § Raw onion, garlic, black pepper
  - § Citrus products and juices (orange, grapefruit, or cranberry juice)
  - § Tomato products
  - § Chocolate or brownies
  - § Caffeine (sodas, coffee, tea, etc)
  - § Peppermint
  - § Fatty or greasy foods (salad dressing, potato chips, French fries, donuts, pastries, ice cream, etc)

◇ The following lifestyle factors are thought to affect the symptoms of GERD. Think CATS: **Caffeine, Alcohol, Tobacco** and **Stress**:

- Try limiting or avoiding caffeine (in sodas, coffee, tea, etc) to see if your symptoms improve
- Do not drink alcohol
- Stop smoking
- Limit or reduce stress in your life

◇ Other suggestions:

- If overweight, lose weight to reach a better weight for your height. If you are unsure what a healthy weight for you would be, ask your doctor or dietitian
- Eat smaller, frequent meals
- Try to *eat more slowly* (~ 30 minutes per meal) and avoid "eating on the run"
- Avoid large, high fat meals
- Avoid late evening snacks or eating before bed
- Avoid laying flat after eating; *try sitting up for at least an hour after finishing a meal*
- Try light walking for 15-30 minutes following a meal
- Try chewing non-mint type gum for 30 minutes following a meal. This will increase saliva production and swallowing. This may decrease the time acid sits in the esophagus and may relieve mild GERD symptoms.
- Elevate the head of the bed 6 to 8 inches to prevent reflux when sleeping. Extra pillows may only elevate your head. Try putting pillows *between* the mattress and box springs near the head of the bed, *or use a special wedge (one option: Mattress Genie<sup>®</sup> Adjustable Bed Wedge, available at: <http://www.contourliving.com/p-19-mattress-genie-adjustable-bed-wedge.aspx>)*
- Avoid tight fitting clothing around the abdomen
- Sleep on your left side

### **Additional resources:**

- International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders:

[www.aboutgerd.org](http://www.aboutgerd.org)

- The University of Virginia Health System, Digestive Health Center, GI Nutrition website:

[www.GInutrition.virginia.edu](http://www.GInutrition.virginia.edu)