

GERD Diet: Foods That Help with Acid Reflux (Heartburn)

Reviewed By:



[Ekta Gupta, M.B.B.S., M.D.](#)

Getting a case of acid reflux (heartburn) once in a while isn't unusual, but some people suffer from burning discomfort, bloating and belching almost every time they eat. About 20% of the population has [gastroesophageal reflux disease \(GERD\)](#), a chronic acid reflux condition that's diagnosed by a doctor.

Normally, the esophageal sphincter (a muscular tube that lets food pass into the stomach and then cinches shut to block it from coming back up) protects the esophagus from stomach acid. However, if the sphincter relaxes, food can push upward through the loosened opening and cause acid reflux.

"Diet plays a major role in controlling acid reflux symptoms and is the first line of therapy used for people with GERD," says [Ekta Gupta, M.B.B.S., M.D.](#), gastroenterologist with Johns Hopkins Medicine.

Foods That May Cause Heartburn

Foods commonly known to be heartburn triggers cause the esophageal sphincter to relax and delay the digestive process, letting food sit in the stomach longer, says Gupta. The worst culprits? Foods that are high in fat, salt or spice such as:

- Fried food
- Fast food
- Pizza
- Potato chips and other processed snacks
- Chili powder and pepper (white, black, cayenne)
- Fatty meats such as bacon and sausage
- Cheese

Other foods that can cause the same problem include:

- Tomato-based sauces

- Citrus fruits
- Chocolate
- Peppermint
- Carbonated beverages

"Moderation is key since many people may not be able to or want to completely eliminate these foods," says Gupta. "But try to avoid eating problem foods late in the evening closer to bedtime, so they're not sitting in your stomach and then coming up your esophagus when you lay down at night. It's also a good idea to eat small frequent meals instead of bigger, heavier meals and avoid late-night dinners and bedtime snacks."

Foods That Help Prevent Acid Reflux

Good news: There are plenty of things you can eat to help prevent acid reflux. Stock your kitchen with foods from these three categories:

High-fiber foods

Fibrous foods make you feel full so you're less likely to overeat, which may contribute to heartburn. So, load up on healthy fiber from these foods:

- Whole grains such as oatmeal, couscous and brown rice.
- Root vegetables such as sweet potatoes, carrots and beets.
- Green vegetables such as asparagus, broccoli and green beans.

Alkaline foods

Foods fall somewhere along the pH scale (an indicator of acid levels). Those that have a low pH are acidic and more likely to cause reflux. Those with higher pH are alkaline and can help offset strong stomach acid. Alkaline foods include:

- Bananas
- Melons
- Cauliflower
- Fennel
- Nuts

Watery foods

Eating foods that contain a lot of water can dilute and weaken stomach acid. Choose foods such as:

- Celery
- Cucumber
- Lettuce
- Watermelon
- Broth-based soups
- Herbal tea

Heartburn Home Remedies

People with heartburn commonly reach for antacids, over-the-counter medications that neutralize stomach acid. But eating certain foods may also offer relief from symptoms. Consider trying the following:

Milk

Does milk help with heartburn? "Milk is often thought to relieve heartburn," says Gupta. "But you have to keep in mind that milk comes in different varieties — whole milk with the full amount of fat, 2% fat, and skim or nonfat milk. The fat in milk can aggravate acid reflux. But nonfat milk can act as a temporary buffer between the stomach lining and acidic stomach contents and provide immediate relief of heartburn symptoms." Low-fat yogurt has the same soothing qualities along with a healthy dose of probiotics (good bacteria that enhance digestion).

Ginger

Ginger is one of the best digestive aids because of its medicinal properties. It's alkaline in nature and anti-inflammatory, which eases irritation in the digestive tract. Try sipping ginger tea when you feel heartburn coming on.

Apple cider vinegar

While there isn't enough research to prove that drinking apple cider vinegar works for acid reflux, many people swear that it helps. However, you should never drink it at full concentration because it's a strong acid that can irritate the esophagus. Instead, put a small amount in warm water and drink it with meals.

Lemon water

Lemon juice is generally considered very acidic, but a small amount of lemon juice mixed with warm water and honey has an alkalizing effect that neutralizes stomach acid. Also, honey has natural antioxidants, which protect the health of cells.

GERD is often treatable through a combination of lifestyle changes and medication. But persistent symptoms of reflux need thorough evaluation by a gastroenterologist who can find the underlying cause and discuss available treatment options.