

ELM Medicine

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**Specialist Clinic. Internal Medicine. Infectious Diseases. Hepatitis B & C. Chronic Pain.
Lifestyle Medicine Clinic. Stress Reduction Clinic**

Dr. Atreyi Mukherji, MD, MPH, FCRPC

GERD Diet

What are common triggers of heartburn/ reflux ?

1. Too Much Food: The first thing to think about, in terms of curbing heartburn, isn't this or that specific food. It's the amount of food you eat at a time. When it comes to heartburn risk, the sheer volume of what you eat matters. And this is one case where bigger isn't better. No matter what the food is, how good it looks, or how much you like it, eating too much food at once makes heartburn more likely.

Tip: Try using smaller plates to trim your portions.

2. Eating on the Go: Always eating in a hurry? Shoveling food down is also a no-no, if you want to tame heartburn. The three G's -- grab, gulp, and go -- don't make for good digestion and can make heartburn symptoms more likely. So slow down when you eat if you're concerned about heartburn symptoms.

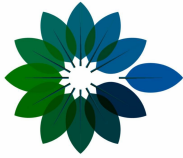
3. Fatty Foods: High-fat foods tend to stay in the stomach longer, and increase risk of heartburn.

Tip: Cut Back on Fat

You may not have to give up your favorite foods. Preparing them differently could help tame your heartburn. You might be able to bake, broil, grill, or roast some foods instead of frying them. And you could trim extra fat off meat and poultry, and cut the skin off chicken. Little tweaks might trim enough fat to make a difference for heartburn -- and your overall health.

4. Acidic Foods: Acidic foods -- which include tomatoes and products that contain tomatoes (such as tomato sauce and salsa) and citrus fruits (such as oranges, grapefruits, and lemons) -- can trigger heartburn, especially if you eat them by themselves, on an empty stomach. Vinegar is also highly acidic -- not that you're going to eat vinegar by itself, but it's a common ingredient in salad dressings and other dishes.

You can't tell how acidic a food is by looking at it. It's not on the nutrition label either. But you can research a food's pH, which is a score of its acid content. The lower the pH number, the higher the acid -- lemon juice has a pH of 2.0. If you aim for foods with a pH of 5 or above, you may have fewer symptoms. You can find the pH level of foods on some government sites and in low-acid diet cookbooks.



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Tip: Limit acidic foods

If you do want to have acidic foods, limit the portion size and have something else -- that isn't acidic -- with it. For instance, have a little less tomato sauce and have it with spaghetti and a little meat or vegetables at the same time. Everyone is different, so experiment to find your comfort zone.

5. Drinks That May Trigger Heartburn: Preventing heartburn isn't just about food choices. Certain drinks can make heartburn more likely. Those beverages include coffee (regular or decaffeinated), caffeinated tea, colas, other carbonated drinks, and excess alcoholic beverages. Caffeinated beverages boost acid in the stomach and alcoholic beverages can relax the lower esophageal sphincter, leading to heartburn. And sodas, regardless of caffeine, can bloat the stomach, which may lead to heartburn.

Heartburn Tip: Try Other Drinks

To make heartburn less likely, choose drinks that aren't fizzy and don't contain caffeine. Options include herbal teas, milk, and plain water. Having water with meals would also dilute stomach acid, making heartburn less likely. You may also want to limit tomato or citrus juices because of their acidity. And if you must have your coffee or other drinks that could promote heartburn, try to cut back -- maybe a smaller mug would help.

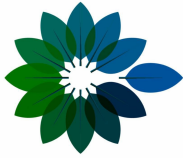
6. Chocolate: Chocolate contains caffeine, which can be a heartburn trigger. If you can't bear the thought of giving up chocolate, see if cutting back helps you avoid heartburn. Watch your portion size, too; maybe you can handle a nibble. And keep the big picture in mind -- is that chocolate coming at the end of a fatty feast? Are you eating it by itself on an empty stomach? In short, what other heartburn triggers may be at play?

7. Spicy Foods: Got a taste for spicy foods -- the hotter, the better? All that heat may provoke heartburn. Peppery foods and hot sauces can be heartburn triggers. But it's not just scorching hot items that are in question. Peppermint is cool, not fiery, but it may relax the lower esophageal sphincter, leading to heartburn. And although garlic and onions aren't spices, they are flavourful foods that may spur heartburn.

Foods that can soothe heartburn

To curb heartburn, build your meals around naturally low-acid foods like:

- Melons and bananas. While most fruits have a high acid content, these don't. Bananas are always handy as a snack food. All sorts of melons are good, like watermelon, cantaloupe, and honeydew.



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- Oatmeal. It's a great way to start your day. Oatmeal doesn't cause reflux, it's filling, and it has lots of healthy fibre.
 - Bread. Choose whole-grain -- it will be the first ingredient on the label -- which is made with unprocessed grains. Other healthy-sounding breads -- like wheat, whole-wheat, or 7-grain -- may be made with refined grains, which are stripped of natural fibre, vitamins, and other nutrients.
 - Rice and couscous. These healthy complex carbs are great if you have reflux. When choosing rice, go for brown rice, which has more fibre.
 - Green veggies. Broccoli, asparagus, green beans, celery, and cauliflower are all low in acid.
 - Lean poultry and meats. Prepare chicken and turkey grilled, broiled, baked, or steamed. Just remove the skin-- and don't fry it, Roland says. Even ground beef and steak can be fine, as long as they're lean.
 - Potatoes. Other root vegetables are good, too -- just not onions.
 - Fish. Grilled, poached, and baked fish are all good choices. Just don't fry it or use fatty sauces.
 - Egg whites. They're a good source of protein and are low in acid. Just skip the yolk, which is more likely to cause symptoms.
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Other Foods that can soothe heartburn

They won't necessarily work for everyone , but it is worth a try:

- Fennel. This crunchy vegetable with a licorice flavour makes a great addition to salads. There's some evidence that fennel can improve your digestion. It has a pH of 6.9, so it's low in acid, too.
- Ginger. A long-standing natural treatment for upset stomach, ginger does seem to have benefits for reflux.
- Parsley. That sprig of parsley on your plate isn't only for decoration. Parsley has been a traditional treatment for upset stomach for hundreds of years. And there's some evidence that it can help with acid reflux.
- Aloe vera. This is another old treatment for GI problems that seems to help with reflux. You can buy aloe vera as a plant or as a supplement -- in capsules, juices, and other forms. It works as a thickener in recipes. Just make sure it's free of anthraquinones (primarily the compound aloin), which can be irritating to the digestive system.

Source: AZIM, WebMD, Stanford U.