

## **GERD AND HOW BEST TO TREAT IT**

### **WHAT IS GERD?**

GERD (gastroesophageal reflux disease) happens when the acid in your stomach flows back up into your throat through your swallowing tube (esophagus). This can cause heartburn and a sour taste in your mouth. These symptoms usually happen often and can last for a long time. It's important to get treatment because GERD can sometimes damage your esophagus.

### **HOW IS GERD TREATED?**

If you have mild symptoms, your doctor may suggest that you first try over-the-counter medicines—antacids (like Tums) or other medicines such as Pepcid or Gaviscon.

You might also relieve your symptoms by making some changes:



- Lose weight if you need to.
- Eat several small meals instead of 2 or 3 large ones.
- After you eat, wait 2 to 3 hours before lying down. Avoid late-night snacking.
- If there are things (like chocolate, coffee, alcohol, or spicy food) that seem to bring on your symptoms, try to avoid them.
- If you smoke, talk to your health care provider about quitting.
- Avoid wearing tight clothing or tight belts.
- Sleep with your head raised. Make sure your entire bed is sloped by putting wooden blocks under the top legs of the bed. Using pillows or simply raising the head of an adjustable bed may worsen your symptoms.

### **WHAT IF I'VE TRIED ALL OF THESE THINGS AND MY SYMPTOMS AREN'T BETTER?**

Your healthcare provider may suggest that you take a medicine called a proton pump inhibitor (PPI). These are powerful medicines that stop your stomach from making too much acid.

### **WHEN AND HOW CAN I STOP TAKING PPIs?**

PPIs are usually taken for about 8 weeks—sometimes longer if your doctor thinks you should. PPIs are safe medicines when taken properly but using them for a year or more may cause some problems, like getting pneumonia or breaking your hip. That's why it's important to talk with your doctor about whether or not you should stop.

If you've been on a PPI for some time and you're feeling better, you might be nervous about trying to stop. You can discuss a “stop strategy” with your doctor which might include lowering the dose of your PPI or taking it less often. Using a medicine like Tums or Gaviscon can help relieve your symptoms while you're trying to stop the PPI. So can sticking to the lifestyle changes covered in the section above.

**Always remember to talk to your health care provider if your symptoms get worse or return.**

**Sources: 1)** Stopping your proton pump inhibitor or “PPI”. *Rx Files*. 2015; **2)** *Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)*. Healthlink BC. 2020; **3)** *Treating heartburn and gastro-esophageal reflux (GERD): using proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) carefully*. Choosing Wisely Canada.

