



*Palo Alto Medical
Foundation*

A Sutter Health Affiliate

South Asians and Acid Reflux

Acid reflux disease, also known as GERD (gastroesophageal reflux disease), is a very common condition in South Asians. Acid reflux occurs when the acid in the stomach flows backward into the esophagus (or swallowing tube).

Symptoms

Common symptoms of acid reflux include:

- Heartburn (burning pain behind the breastbone)
- Sour taste in the back of the mouth

Less common symptoms that may also be signs of acid reflux include:

- Non-burning chest pain
- Stomach pain (upper part of abdomen)
- Persistent sore throat or hoarseness
- Persistent cough
- New onset asthma or asthma only at night
- Nausea

Symptoms that may indicate a more serious disease requiring immediate medical attention include:

- Difficulty swallowing
- Choking sensation
- Painful swallowing
- Vomiting
- Bleeding (vomiting blood or passing dark-colored stools)
- Unexpected weight loss
- Decreased appetite
- Chest pain

Common Causes

Many of the following major risk factors for acid reflux are typical of a South Asian lifestyle:

- Heavy late-night meals
- Spicy foods
- Fried foods and other foods rich in saturated fats
- Caffeine intake, especially late in the day (such as afternoon tea)
- Being overweight, especially around the stomach

Pregnancy also increases one's risk of experiencing acid reflux.

Treatment

The following lifestyle changes are important for managing acid reflux:

- Eat dinner earlier, at least three to four hours before going to bed.
- Prepare lighter dinners, with less spice and less fat.
- Eliminate caffeinated drinks, especially after 12 p.m.
- Eat smaller meals to avoid overfilling the stomach.
- Restrict alcohol use.
- Quit smoking.
- Lose excess weight.

There are also over-the-counter acid blockers and other medications that can help. Discuss these options with your physician.

Visit www.pamf.org/prana for more information on South Asian health.