



# Live Well, Work Well

Health and wellness tips for your work, home and life—brought to you by the insurance professionals at The Reschini Group



## GERD: GASTROESOPHAGEAL REFLUX DISEASE

Frequent heartburn, evidence of esophageal irritation or inflammation, blood, or weight loss may be associated with a more severe problem known as gastroesophageal reflux disease, or GERD.

### What is GERD?

GERD is a physical condition in which stomach acid flows back up into the esophagus and produces a burning sensation behind the breastbone that moves up toward the neck and throat. It can also create a sour taste and the sensation of food re-entering your mouth. The main symptom of GERD is an uncomfortable feeling of burning, warmth, heat, or pain just behind the breastbone, commonly referred to as heartburn. GERD may also cause chest pain, hoarseness, nausea in the morning, or trouble swallowing.

### What Causes GERD?

When you swallow, the lower esophageal sphincter—a circular band of muscle around the bottom part of your esophagus—relaxes to allow food and liquid to flow down into your stomach. If it weakens or relaxes at any other time, stomach acid flows back up into your esophagus, even if you are in an upright position. Certain foods that can relax this valve and make reflux more likely to occur include chocolate, onions, peppermint, coffee, high-sugar foods, and possibly high-fat foods. Spicy foods, citrus products, and tomato products may cause heartburn if the esophagus is already irritated. Alcohol, tobacco, and some medications can also cause problems.

### Whom Does GERD Affect?

GERD can affect people of any age, including infants and the elderly. The exact number of people with GERD is unclear because so many people treat these symptoms on their own, and most are not actually diagnosed by a doctor.

### When Should I Call a Doctor?

Call your doctor if you experience any of the following:

- No improvement in your symptoms after two weeks of home treatment, different or worse symptoms, or if symptoms are interfering with normal activities
- Choking or difficulty swallowing
- Significant weight loss
- Heartburn occurring frequently over several years that is only partially relieved with lifestyle changes, nonprescription antacids, or acid reducers



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