




# Talking to Your Doctor about GERD

By: IFFGD

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International Foundation for Gastrointestinal Disorders ([www.iffgd.org](http://www.iffgd.org))

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## Tips on Getting the Most out of Your Appointment

Symptoms of GERD vary from person to person. Most people with GERD have mild symptoms, with no visible evidence of tissue damage and little risk of developing complications. If your heartburn happens now and then just after a meal, and less than once per week, it is likely a “benign” condition. But heartburn that occurs more frequently than once a week, becomes more severe, or occurs at night and wakes you from sleep, may be a sign of a more serious condition. When that happens it’s a signal to talk to your doctor.

When you visit your doctor you will want to know

- What’s wrong,
- What the doctor can do to treat it, and
- What you can do to better manage it

Your doctor will begin by taking a history. He or she will ask for a description of the symptoms as well as what things seem to bring them on or make them better. This will be followed by a physical exam, possibly some tests, a diagnosis, and a discussion of treatment options.

## Be Prepared Before Your Appointment

Before your appointment, be prepared to provide your doctor with the following information:

- List of when your heartburn occurs (time of day, after meals, etc.)
- The severity of your heartburn
- How often your heartburn occurs (per week)
- Other symptoms
- How your symptoms affect your daily activities
- How your symptoms affect your sleep
- What diet and lifestyle changes you have made to relieve your symptoms
- If these diet and lifestyle changes have been effective in providing relief
- What antacids and other over-the-counter medications you have used
- What relief (if any) these medications have provided

## Get Your Questions Answered

Here are some questions to ask your doctor during your appointment:

- How can I tell the difference between simple heartburn and a more serious condition?
- Do I have GERD?
- How is GERD treated?
- What medicines are available for GERD?
- Is there a cure?
- How can I manage my symptoms?
- What happens if my symptoms become worse?

If your doctor prescribes a medicine find out:

- What is the correct dosage
- What side effects to look for
- What you can do to minimize or avoid side effects
- What to do if side effects occur
- How long you will need to be on the medicine

You may need to take a medicine long-term to control your GERD. At later visits ask your doctor if your effective dosage can be reduced.

Like other chronic diseases, managing GERD can be a challenge. Effective management often depends on a successful patient-doctor relationship. Although the time you spend with your doctor might be limited, you can help ensure that effective two-way communication takes place during your visit by being prepared. That way, you can get the most out of your visit.

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## About IFFGD

The International Foundation for Gastrointestinal Disorders (IFFGD) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit education and research organization. We work to promote awareness, scientific advancement, and improved care for people affected by chronic digestive conditions. Our mission is to inform, assist, and support people affected by gastrointestinal disorders. Founded in 1991, we rely on donors to carry out our mission. Visit our website at: [www.iffgd.org](http://www.iffgd.org) or [www.aboutIncontinence.org](http://www.aboutIncontinence.org).

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