

Up to 28% of Americans have gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) today. If you have frustrating issues like a sour taste in the back of your mouth, bad breath, heartburn, and other issues, Pioneer GI Clinic can help in their Anchorage, Alaska, office. To learn more about GERD diagnosis and treatment.

What is GERD?

Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) is a common digestive issue in which you experience acid reflux twice a week or more. With acid reflux, stomach acid washes up into your esophagus (the food pipe between your throat and stomach) and the back of your throat.

Most people have a bout of acid reflux at least a few times during their life, but only people who have persistent chronic acid reflux have GERD.

What are the symptoms of GERD?

GERD can cause symptoms including:

- Burning in the back of your throat
- Bitter acidic taste in your mouth
- Heartburn: Discomfort behind your breastbone
- Hoarse voice
- Lump in your throat
- Discomfort or pain when swallowing
- Frequent burping
- Nausea and vomiting
- Chest pain
- Chronic cough

About 75% of people with asthma also have GERD, and the GERD can increase asthma symptoms like difficulty breathing and wheezing.

GERD symptoms often appear shortly after eating, but they can also happen overnight or at other times. If GERD symptoms aren't treated, you could eventually develop ulcers in your esophagus.

Some people with untreated GERD develop a condition called Barrett's esophagus, in which the lining of the esophagus undergoes unhealthy changes. When you have Barrett's esophagus, your risk of a serious type of esophageal cancer goes up.

What causes GERD?

The lower esophageal sphincter is a round muscle that closes around the bottom of your esophagus, and it works together with gravity to keep your food, gastric juices, and bile in your stomach. If the muscle weakens, however, you can experience acid reflux and GERD.

Some factors, including excess body weight, pregnancy, connective tissue disorders, and hiatal hernia, can increase your risk of GERD. Smoking, heavy meals, fatty foods, fried foods, carbonated drinks, caffeine, and certain medications may trigger your symptoms when you have GERD.

How is GERD treated?

Treatment depends on the severity of your GERD and what kind of symptoms you have, so you need a physical exam and acid testing (Bravo™ pH monitoring) as part of the diagnostic process. You may also need an upper endoscopy procedure to check for complications like Barrett's esophagus.

Many medications can help with GERD symptoms, including acid neutralizers and acid reducers. Lifestyle changes, including avoiding trigger substances, eating healthy, and losing extra weight, can also help.

In severe cases of GERD, you could need surgery to help your lower esophageal sphincter work properly.