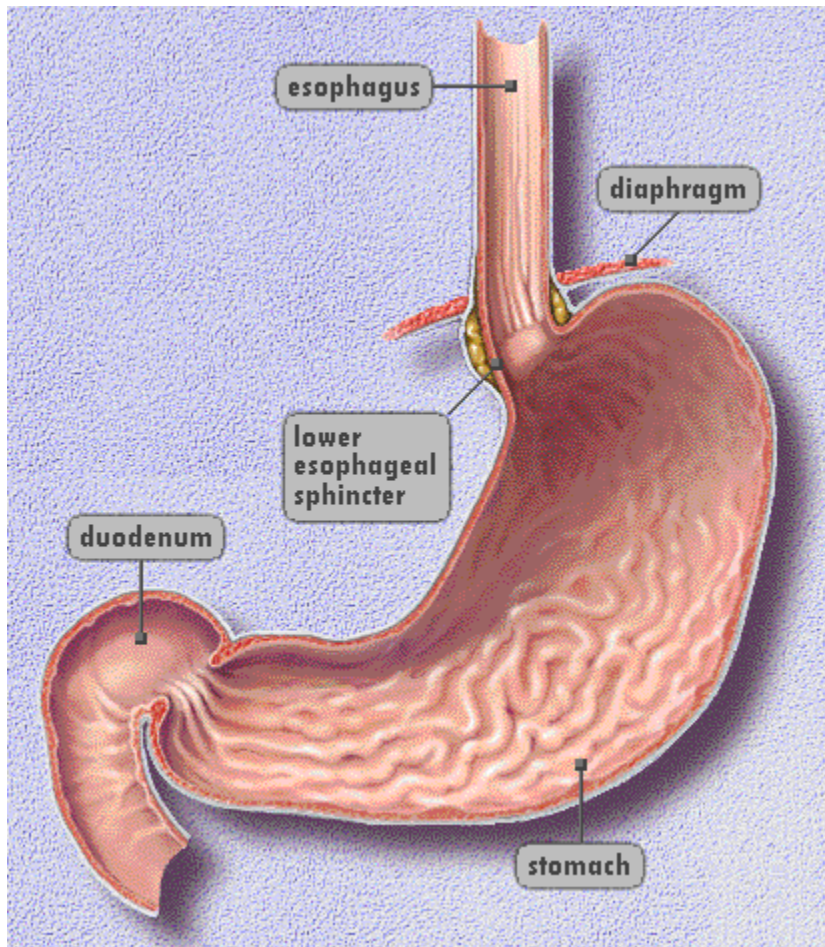


What Masters Swimmers need to know about GERD

Do you have one or more of the following on a continuous basis?

1. Heartburn
2. Indigestion
3. Food regurgitation
4. Difficulty swallowing, choking
5. Chronic sore throat, hoarseness
6. Hiccups
7. Nausea
8. Coughing attacks occurring over a period of several weeks
9. Excessive dental erosion
10. Asthma
11. Sleep apnea, restless sleep, morning headaches
12. Use three or more pillows to sleep — Some doctors rate the severity of symptoms by the number of pillows used

You may have **Gastro Esophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)**. A large percentage of people over the age of 40 (Masters swimmers included) have one or more of these symptoms. GERD is a disease that occurs when reflux of stomach acid into the esophagus is severe enough to impact the patient's life and or damage the esophagus. The tissue of the esophagus doesn't handle the acid well, causing the symptoms listed above.



The end of the esophagus contains the lower esophageal sphincter (**LES**). This muscle opens and closes to keep the food and acids within the stomach. The **LES** can lose tone due to the wrong diet or medicines or it can be affected by a hiatus hernia, which is an out-pouching of the stomach above the level of the diaphragm. Pressure from over eating, tight clothing, or excess weight around the abdomen can force acids past the weakened **LES** into the esophagus. Trying to sleep right after eating can aggravate GERD. Swimming, in contrast to most other sports, is performed in the horizontal position. This allows acid to leak into the esophagus in those with a weakened **LES**, or if a meal is consumed within a couple of hours of swimming.

If you have several of these symptoms, make an appointment with your doctor to get a diagnosis. You want an evaluation of the condition of the stomach, esophagus, and throat. Over time, **GERD** is not just some minor discomforting occurrence; it can lead to complications that are far more serious. But why suffer the annoying effects mentioned above? The following list should be used as a guideline for daily use, after seeing a doctor:

1. Dietary Restrictions: No caffeine containing foods. Caffeine affects the **LES**, causing it to relax and allows for acid reflux. Chocolate, spearmint, peppermint, onions, garlic, acidic citrus and tomato products also have this relaxing effect. Spices, coffee (even decaf) and condiments all allow for excess acid to be produced. Carbonated drinks also allow for increased pressure in the abdomen that makes **GERD** worse. While these items do not cause GERD, they seem to make symptoms worse.
2. No heavy meals or snacks within 3 hours of bedtime.
3. No lifting heavy weights and or intense abdominal exercises (crunches, etc) within a three-hour period after a heavy meal.
4. Do not wear tight clothing, especially around the abdomen.
5. Losing weight will reduce abdominal fat and help reduce pressure on the stomach. Consult your doctor before starting a weight loss program.
6. Raise the head of your bed 6 inches higher than the foot.
7. Try and sleep on your LEFT side, which can help prevent acid from backing up the esophagus.
8. Eat several small meals throughout the day instead of large meals.
9. If acid reflux happens and no antacids are around, simply chewing gum will help reduce the acid. The saliva produced is alkaline and helps neutralize the excess acid.
10. Before swimming, take a product like Gaviscon, which foams with water to provide a protective barrier into the esophagus. Also, concentrated antacids like Mylanta Extra Strength can act to coat the linings and help neutralize the excess acid.
11. NEVER allow this condition to go untreated over time. Do not try and deal with the discomfort in a "macho" fashion. Putting up with discomfort or pain seems to come with athletic training, but this type of discomfort can lead to complications that are more serious if not diagnosed and treated properly.

12. Tell your doctor if you smoke, drink alcohol, take non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications (NSAIDS) such as aspirin and ibuprofen, take decongestants, sedatives, or use asthma inhalers. All of these, and many others, can weaken the **LES** and lead to GERD symptoms.

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<http://www.gerd.com/home.htm>