From Dr. Escudé...

Dietary Considerations for People with Intellectual Disabilities and Reflux

In addition to the usual signs of Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD), people who have a limited ability to communicate verbally may exhibit behaviors that are not easily recognizable as signs of gastrointestinal upset. If a person is diagnosed with GERD, adverse behaviors may improve once the person experiences less discomfort from the condition. Dietary management of GERD can help.

Considerations include limiting foods like:

- chocolate
- carminatives such as spearmint or peppermint
- fats

These foods have been associated with a decreased lower esophageal sphincter (LES) pressure and sometimes promote reflux.

Other foods like tomato-based products and spicy foods can provoke heartburn symptoms most likely related to direct irritation to the esophagus, possibly because of the high osmolality of these substances.

Other foods with an association with GERD include:

- alcoholic beverages which can promote reflux by decreasing LES pressure, impairing esophageal peristalsis, and promoting acid secretion (this includes spirits, beer and wine)
- coffee or tea as a cause is controversial

The timing of meals and snacks should also be considered. Late evening or nighttime eating may play a role in increasing overnight GERD symptoms which may be expressed as nighttime agitation, coughing, and resisting lying down or going to bed.

Thanks for your careful attention to helping improve the lives of people we support.
Dr. Escudé has dedicated his career to providing healthcare for people with IDD and other vulnerable populations and teaches on the subject throughout the country.