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GERD

Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease

GERD—What does this mean? What is it?

GERD (Gastro Esophageal Reflux Disease) occurs when a small valve (the lower esophageal sphincter or LES) between the stomach and the esophagus leaks, causing digestive fluids and stomach acid to “back up” from the stomach into the esophagus. This acid can irritate the esophagus, leading to symptoms. GERD can also damage the delicate lining on the inside of the esophagus, leading to more serious problems in some patients.

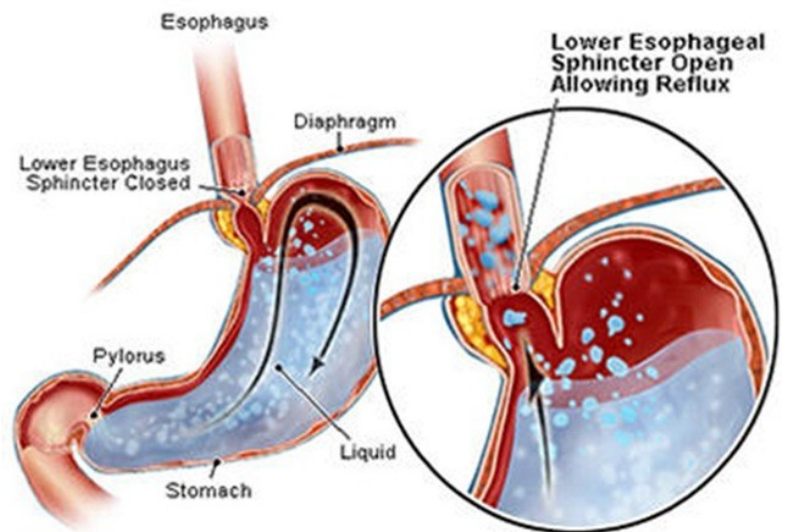
Frequent heartburn is the most common symptom of GERD and often occurs after meals. It is often described as an uncomfortable, rising, burning sensation behind the breastbone. Other major symptoms are: regurgitation of gastric acid or sour contents into the mouth; difficult and/or painful swallowing.

What is the goal of treatment?

The goal of treatment is to reduce the amount of stomach acid “backing up” into the esophagus. Medical treatment may be necessary to relieve symptoms and heal any damage to the esophagus.

What steps can be taken to relieve GERD symptoms?

Follow all of your doctor’s recommendations and take any medications as directed. Listed on the back are some simple lifestyle changes that you may find helpful.



GERD Precautions



1. Bed Blocks

Elevate the head of your bed 2-6 inches with wood blocks or bricks. Using extra pillows is NOT a good substitution. Use of a foam wedge beneath the upper half of the body is an alternative.



2. Avoid Foods If They Cause Symptoms

Foods that may aggravate symptoms include: tomato and citrus juices (grapefruit, orange), chocolate, mints, coffee, tea, colas, and alcoholic beverages.



3. Do Not Lie Down for 2 Hours After Eating

Allow gravity to work. Also, avoid bending over at the waist to pick up things; instead, bend at the knees.



4. Stop Smoking

If you cannot stop, decreasing the number of cigarettes you smoke each day may help.



5. Limit coffee

Limit coffee to 2-3 cups per day. Limiting consumption of other caffeine-containing beverages (tea, soft drinks) may also be helpful.



6. Avoid Tight Clothing

Tight belts, tight pants or girdles can increase the pressure on the abdomen.



7. Antacids

Antacids can be taken at bedtime and 30-60 minutes after each meal or as directed by your doctor.



8. Eat Smaller Meals

Don't overfill your stomach.



9. Lose Weight

Excess weight increases the amount of pressure constantly placed on your stomach. Even small amounts of weight loss may help.