



Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)

Have you ever experienced a burning sensation in your chest or a sour taste in your mouth after a meal? You might have experienced what's known as Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease, or GERD. GERD is a common condition that affects many people worldwide.

What is GERD?

GERD occurs when stomach contents, including acid, flow back into the esophagus (the tube connecting your mouth to your stomach). This backward flow is known as acid reflux, which can irritate the esophagus lining and lead to uncomfortable symptoms.

What are the Symptoms?

The most common symptoms of GERD are heartburn and acid regurgitation. Heartburn is a burning sensation behind the breastbone, often after eating. Acid regurgitation is the feeling of stomach fluid coming up into the chest, which may even reach the mouth. Less common symptoms include unexplained chest pain, wheezing, a sore throat, trouble swallowing and coughing.

What Causes GERD?

GERD happens when the lower esophageal sphincter (LES), a muscle that acts as a valve between the esophagus and stomach, doesn't close properly. This allows stomach contents to flow back into the esophagus. This can happen for no reason. Factors such as obesity, pregnancy, smoking, excess alcohol



use, and consumption of certain foods like coffee, citrus drinks, tomato-based products, chocolate, peppermint, and fatty foods can contribute to GERD.

How is GERD Diagnosed?

If a patient experiences minor symptoms of GERD, namely heartburn and acid regurgitation, additional tests may not be necessary before starting treatment. However, if symptoms persist or other symptoms such as weight loss, trouble swallowing, or internal bleeding are present, additional testing may be necessary. These tests can include upper endoscopy “scope” test, barium UGI series x-ray, pH testing, or a biopsy.

How is GERD Treated?

Lifestyle changes can often help reduce or even eliminate the symptoms of GERD. This includes:

1. avoiding foods and drinks that trigger symptoms,
2. not eating within three hours of bedtime, and
3. elevating the head of the bed 4 - 6” and
4. sleeping left side down
5. Over-the-counter antacids can also help decrease discomfort.
6. Acid-reducing medications such as proton pump inhibitors or
7. H2 receptor antagonists may be prescribed if symptoms persist.
8. Surgery, such as the LINX procedure, may be considered in severe cases.

Living with GERD

Living with GERD can be challenging but can be managed effectively with the proper treatment and lifestyle adjustments. Many people with GERD lead normal, healthy lives. It's important to remember that everyone's experience with GERD is unique.

When should I see a Doctor?

You should see your doctor immediately if you experience symptoms such as unexplained weight loss, trouble swallowing, internal bleeding, and frequent heartburn and/or acid regurgitation. Also, if you use over-the-counter medications regularly to reduce heartburn symptoms, you should consult a physician to

determine the best course of treatment for you. Undertreated GERD for more than 5 years can increase the risk of Barrett's esophagus, a precancerous condition.

Conclusion

GERD is a common but manageable condition. If you have GERD, don't hesitate to contact a healthcare professional. With the proper treatment and lifestyle changes, you can manage your symptoms and improve your quality of life. Please note that this information is intended to provide general guidance and does not replace your doctor's advice. Always consult your doctor about your specific condition.

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