

GASTROESOPHAGEAL REFLUX DISEASE (HEARTBURN/GERD)

TO YOUR HEALTH - PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

DESCRIPTION

A condition that occurs when acids from the stomach move backward (reflux) into the esophagus (the food pipe that carries food from the mouth to the stomach).

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Persistent heartburn (stomach acid touches the lining of the esophagus and causes a burning sensation in the chest). You can have GERD without having heartburn.
- Regurgitation (acid can be tasted in the back of the mouth).
- Hoarseness in the morning
- Difficulty swallowing
- Feels like you have food stuck in your throat, like you are choking, or your throat is tight.
- Dry cough and bad breath
- Excessive clearing of the throat
- Burning in the mouth

CAUSES

Heartburn is not associated with a heart disorder. It is caused by a backflow of acid from the stomach into the esophagus. The muscles that close off the upper stomach become lax, allowing stomach juices to enter the esophagus and irritate its lining.

RISK INCREASES WITH

Hiatal hernia (part of stomach protrudes into the chest)
Overweight
Pregnancy
Smoking
Certain foods can trigger symptoms (caffeine, fried foods, garlic, citrus fruits).

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Don't bend over, lie down or exercise immediately after eating.
- Wear loose clothing.
- Raise the head of the bed 6 to 8 inches with blocks.
- Do not eat within 1-1/2 - 2 hours before bedtime.
- If you smoke, stop.
- Avoid foods that trigger symptoms.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Symptoms can be controlled with treatment, but recurrence is common.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Irritating stomach acids can damage the esophagus and leave scars that may narrow the esophagus.
- Esophageal ulcers.

GENERAL MEASURES

Heartburn usually begins within about an hour after eating and may continue for several hours. Usually no medical care is necessary. Self-treatment with antacids and/or acid reducers and taking preventive measures should control the symptoms.

MEDICATION

Nonprescription antacids, or drugs that stop acid production or help the muscles that empty your stomach may be prescribed. Combinations of these drugs may help control symptoms. Your health care provider will help you decide which ones will work best for you.

ACTIVITY

No limits.

DIET

Do not drink alcohol. Lose weight, if needed. Eat small meals. Avoid the foods that trigger symptoms.

NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF...

- Swallowing becomes more difficult.
- Symptoms continue despite self-care.

Student Health Center

WWW.SIU.EDU/~SHC

This information is for educational purposes only. Consult your doctor for specific medical advice, diagnosis and treatment.



618-453-3311

Dial-A-Nurse is available after-hours until 10:30 p.m. during fall and spring semesters. In case of emergency dial 911.