Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease: Prevention and Treatment Tip Sheet

About Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)

- Gastroesophageal reflux disease is often referred to as GERD, reflux, acid reflux, or heartburn. This is a condition in which the acid produced in the stomach comes up into the food tube, or esophagus, and over time, can injure the lining of the esophagus. In some cases, this injured tissue can progress to a pre-cancerous condition called Barrett’s esophagus. This is why the diagnosis and treatment of GERD is so important.

Symptoms

- The hallmark symptom of GERD is heartburn.
- Other symptoms can include indigestion, hoarse voice, acidic taste in the mouth, to name a few.
- In some cases, GERD causes no symptoms at all. This is called “silent GERD.”

Diagnosis

- For persistent heartburn, you should see a gastroenterologist for diagnosis and treatment.
- An upper endoscopy procedure may be done to view the inside of the esophagus, stomach, and part of the small intestine.

Treatment

- Dietary and lifestyle triggers of GERD symptoms should be avoided (see below).
- If you have GERD, your gastroenterologist may prescribe medications to reduce acid in the stomach. This is meant to treat GERD and any inflammation of the esophagus (called esophagitis), as well as prevent progression of the condition to Barrett’s esophagus.
- If you have Barrett’s esophagus, you may be given medications to reduce the acid in your stomach and prevent the condition from worsening. In some cases of severe Barrett’s esophagus, advanced procedures such as radiofrequency ablation may be performed to treat the injured tissue and prevent progression to cancer.
- Surgery also may be an option to treat GERD, if it is being caused by a hiatal hernia (a condition where a portion of the stomach slips into the chest through the diaphragm) or by a loose valve between the esophagus and the stomach.

Foods To Avoid

- For some people, avoiding some or all of these potential dietary triggers may be helpful in relieving symptoms and preventing future episodes of GERD:
  - Alcohol
  - Caffeine (chocolate, coffee, soda, tea)
  - Citrus fruits and juices
  - High-fat foods, including fried foods and full-fat dairy products
  - Mint (peppermint, spearmint)
  - Onions, peppers, and spicy foods
  - Tomato products

Lifestyle Tips

- For many people, these tips can be helpful in relieving symptoms and preventing future episodes of GERD:
  - Avoid large meals; eat small frequent meals throughout the day
  - Spend time walking after a meal to aid digestion
  - Avoid lying down at least 2 hours after eating a meal
  - Sleep with your head elevated
  - Maintain a healthy weight, as excess weight contributes to reflux
  - Exercise regularly
  - Avoid use of tobacco products

If you have chronic heartburn or other GERD symptom, please see a doctor for diagnosis and treatment.

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