

Reflux – Gerd

If you have a sensation of warmth or burning below your breastbone rising toward your neck it may be your testimony, but there also may be some other possibilities. If the pain is made worse by lying down or bending over, you may have gastro esophageal reflux disease called GERD. The lower end of the esophagus is guarded by a muscular valve called (the lower esophageal sphincter or LES) which is closed tightly except when food needs to pass. The pain can be so severe that it can mimic cardiac angina. It has been studied that 7% of adults have daily episodes of heartburn, 14% have it weekly and 35% have it monthly. About 90% of users of over the counter antacids use them for GERD rather than peptic ulcer disease.

It is important to find out whether reflux is occurring and whether it has done damage. This is best done by endoscopic examination of the esophagus with a microscope with specimens taken to see if the lining is inflamed. The normal lining of the esophagus is intolerant to repeated prolonged exposure to gastric juice. Ulcers can occur or scared narrowing or change in the cells called Barrett's esophageal inflammation, which may lead to cancer.

If part of the stomach is misplaced above the diaphragm (hiatal hernia) reflux with esophagitis tends to be more common as it tends to lead to incompetence of the LES. If the stomach empties slowly GERD and esophagitis are more common.

Antacids help mild regurgitation used 1 hour and three hours after eating and at bedtime such as liquid Maalox or Mylanta. In severe regurgitation, treatment to reduce reflux involves life style changes, medicine, and possibly surgery. There are many things that we can do that may help like, avoid caffeine including colas, lose weight, learn to cope with stress, elevate the head of the bed 6 inches, and avoid eating late at night. Unfortunately chocolate relaxes the sphincter as does several medicines such as atropine atrovent, Librium, phentolamine, isoproterenol, and nitrates like nitroglycerine and calcium channel blockers.

More than one anti reflux medicine may be used for those that have severe disease. If resistant to medicines and life style changes, you may have to turn to surgery. The surgery is called a Nissen Fundoplication, which is successful 85% of the time. Symptoms may reoccur after the surgery. If you have any of these symptoms please see your provider because we want the burning to stop.

Submitted by Dave Holland