

GERD?

You may have never heard of this phrase but you could be one of approximately 17 million people in the United States that suffer from this condition. GERD stands for Gastro Esophageal Reflux Disease and is commonly referred to as “reflux”. In GERD patients, gastric juices that should normally stay in the stomach back up into the esophagus (the muscular tube that carries food from the throat to the stomach). Not everyone has the same symptoms but common symptoms include frequent heartburn, sour or bitter taste from fluid flowing backward from the stomach, difficult or painful swallowing, hoarseness, nighttime wheezing or coughing, the need to clear your throat repeatedly, a worsening of symptoms after eating especially after bending over or lying down. Most people get heartburn symptoms occasionally, but if symptoms occur regularly then it is referred to a GERD.

The reason stomach juices can back up into the esophagus has to do with a small muscular ring called the lower esophageal sphincter (LES). This ring is supposed to allow for only one-way movement of food and fluid into the stomach. When the LES is not working, then the one-way function is lost and movement can move backward in the esophagus. Often this happens when the muscles of this ring suddenly relax for short periods of time. The juices that help digest food are much too harsh for the esophagus causing pain, inflammation, and damage to it. If this condition is allowed to continue, serious complications can occur including cough, hoarseness, bleeding in the esophagus, and narrowing of the esophagus.

There are numerous reasons that GERD occurs in people. Sometimes certain foods seem to trigger symptoms more than others do. Some foods frequently associated with GERD are coffee, chocolate, fatty or spicy foods, carbonated beverages, peppermint, spearmint, citrus fruits, tomatoes, whole milk, and onions. Many people develop symptoms after laying down so avoiding eating shortly before lying down is recommended. Being overweight seems to cause more pressure and weight loss is recommended. Alcohol and smoking both have been associated with increased reflux problems and should be avoided. Besides, smoking is unhealthy so you should **QUIT**. There are many medications that people can use to help with GERD which really work well. If you have GERD, there is help out there for you and you should discuss this treatable condition with your doctor. Here is to your health.