

## Supportive advices with GERD

GERD is a disease in which acid from the stomach flows back (refluxes) into the esophagus, causing irritation and sometimes damage to the lining of the esophagus. The reflux of stomach acid can reach high enough to affect the vocal cords or even flow into the lungs (called aspiration), causing damage to those tissues and organs as well. In general, damage occurs to the esophagus when acid is refluxed too frequently, is too acidic, and when the esophagus is unable to clear away the acid quickly. The treatments of GERD are designed to prevent one or all of these elements from occurring.

### **Treatment of GERD is dependent on its severity:**

Mild symptoms — changes of diet and/or life style:

- \* Quit smoking — Smoking reduces the amount of saliva in the mouth and throat. Saliva contributes to neutralizing refluxed acid. Smoking also lowers the pressure in the lower esophageal sphincter and provokes coughing, causing frequent episodes of acid reflux in the esophagus.
- \* Avoid reflux inducing foods — Some foods also cause relaxation of the lower esophageal sphincter, promoting reflux. Patients can usually identify those foods themselves, but, in general, it is best to avoid excessive caffeine, chocolate, sugar, sodas, alcohol, fatty food, paprika, pepper and peppermint.
- \* Avoid late meals — Lying down with a full stomach makes reflux more likely.
- \* Weight loss — In significantly overweight people, losing weight may help reduce reflux.
- \* Raise the head of the bed six to eight inches — If you have nighttime heartburn, one of the most useful things you can do is elevate the head of your bed. Having the head and shoulders higher than the stomach lets gravity work to keep acid from refluxing. You can raise the bed with blocks of wood or a foam wedge under the mattress. Do not prop yourself up on pillows, as this can produce an unnatural bend in the body that will increase pressure on the stomach, making reflux more likely.

- \* Avoid wearing tight fitting garments — Tight fitting garments can raise stomach pressure, forcing stomach contents into the esophagus.
- \* Promote salivation by chewing gum or using oral lozenges — This will help to clear stomach acid that has entered the esophagus.
- \* Eat smaller meals — Eating smaller meals helps prevent the stomach from becoming over-distended, which tends to cause reflux.
- \* Review your medications — Medications you may be taking for other conditions may also be contributing to reflux.

Moderate to severe symptoms — Patients with moderate to severe symptoms, complications of GERD, or mild symptoms that have not responded to the lifestyle modifications described above usually require treatment with prescription medications.

Since medications cannot cure GERD, but can only alleviate symptoms and prevent damage to the esophagus, surgical treatment should be considered in selected cases.

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