



Common Questions About Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)

557



International Foundation for Gastrointestinal Disorders (www.iffgd.org)

© Copyright 2014 by the International Foundation for Gastrointestinal Disorders

What is GERD?

GERD is a condition where stomach contents flow back (reflux) into the esophagus (food tube) causing troublesome symptoms and/or possible damage to the esophagus. GERD is a chronic disease for which long-term medical therapy is usually effective.

What are the signs and symptoms of GERD?

The most common symptom of GERD is heartburn. Another typical symptom is reflux of fluid into the mouth.

Some of the other less common symptoms may include difficulty or pain when swallowing, sensation of food sticking in the esophagus, hoarseness, throat-clearing, chronic sore throat, wheezing, or chronic cough.

How do I know if I have GERD?

Only a doctor can make a diagnosis of GERD. Talk to your doctor if:

- Your heartburn happens 2 or more times a week
- Your heartburn gets worse
- Your heartburn wakes you from sleep at night
- You've had heartburn now and then for several years
- You have difficulty or pain when swallowing
- Your discomfort interferes with daily activities

GERD can usually be diagnosed based on the signs and symptoms. Tests may be done to confirm or exclude a GERD diagnosis.

What causes GERD?

There is no known single cause of GERD. Reflux occurs when the muscle barrier between the stomach and the esophagus does not work as it should or is somehow overwhelmed.

How is GERD treated?

Treatment of GERD is long-term. The goals are to control or reduce symptoms, heal an injured esophagus, and manage or prevent complications.

Treatment options include lifestyle changes, medicines, surgery, or a combination of approaches.

Lifestyle changes – This means changing things you have

control over. Try to identify and avoid things that may bring on symptoms or make them worse. Ask your doctor about diet. Let your doctor know about any medicines you take as some can worsen symptoms.

Medicines – Over-the-counter medicines provide only temporary relief of heartburn. Tell your doctor if you need to take one for more than two weeks.

The most commonly prescribed medicines to treat GERD are H2 blockers and the more powerful PPIs (proton pump inhibitors). These reduce or limit acid secretion in your stomach.

Surgery – For some people, surgery to strengthen the barrier between the stomach and esophagus may be an option. Medicine may still need to be taken after surgery to control symptoms. Before having surgery, review all aspects of the procedure with your primary care doctor or gastroenterologist and the surgeon.

Ask your doctor questions about your treatment plan and options. Ask why the treatment is important for you. If you need to take a medicine long-term, at later visits ask your doctor if your effective dosage can be reduced. Ask about risks as well as benefits. Ask about side effects; these can occur with any treatment. Learn what to do if they occur, and how to minimize or avoid them.

Where can I learn more?

Learn more on our website at www.aboutGERD.org or in our fact sheet No. 501.

About IFFGD

The International Foundation for Gastrointestinal Disorders (IFFGD) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit education and research organization. We work to promote awareness, scientific advancement, and improved care for people affected by chronic digestive conditions. Our mission is to inform, assist, and support people affected by gastrointestinal disorders. Founded in 1991, we rely on donors to carry out our mission. Visit our website at: www.iffgd.org.

IFFGD

537 Long Point Road, Suite 101
Mt Pleasant, SC 29464

About the Publication

Opinions expressed are an author's own and not necessarily those of the International Foundation for Gastrointestinal Disorders (IFFGD). IFFGD does not guarantee or endorse any product in this publication or any claim made by an author and disclaims all liability relating thereto. This article is in no way intended to replace the knowledge or diagnosis of your healthcare provider. We advise seeing a healthcare provider whenever a health problem arises requiring an expert's care.

For more information, or permission to reprint this article, contact IFFGD by phone at 414-964-1799 or by email at iffgd@iffgd.org.
