GERD - Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease

Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease, or GERD, is an irritation of the swallowing tube (also called the esophagus) by acid that comes up from the stomach. GERD is also called “acid reflux.” People who have pain with GERD may call it “acid indigestion” or “heartburn.” Despite its name, heartburn has nothing to do with the heart although some of the symptoms are similar to a heart attack.

What Causes GERD?
When swallowing, food passes down the throat and through the esophagus to the stomach. Normally, a muscular valve called the lower esophageal sphincter opens to allow food into the stomach (or to let air out with burping); then it closes again. Next, the stomach releases strong acids to help break down the food.

When the lower esophageal sphincter opens too often or does not close tight enough, stomach acid can reflux, or wash back into the esophagus, causing damage to the lining. Some people have heartburn pain when reflux happens. Some people feel nothing. Other symptoms include a bitter taste in your mouth, coughing at night, hoarseness in the morning or worsening asthma.

Stomach acid in the esophagus can cause ulcers, strictures (narrowing) and even cancer.

Treatment
The first treatments your doctor will usually recommend for GERD are lifestyle and dietary changes. The purpose of these changes is to reduce the amount of reflux or reduce the potential for damage to the esophageal lining from refluxed substances. Your habits and diet cause or worsen GERD by relaxing the lower esophageal sphincter and allowing it to open, increasing the amount of acid in the stomach, increasing stomach pressure or by making the esophagus more sensitive to harsh acids.

Eating Habits That Improve GERD
- Eat small portions
- Avoid eating onions, chocolate, peppermint, high-fat or spicy foods, citrus fruits, garlic, and tomatoes or tomato-based products
- Avoid drinking citrus juices, alcohol, coffee, tea, soft drinks, and other caffeinated and carbonated drinks
- Avoid eating or drinking for three hours before going to bed
Lifestyle Habits That Improve GERD

- Lose weight (if you are overweight)
- Stop smoking
- Avoid wearing tight-fitting clothing or belts
- Avoid lying down or prolonged bending over, especially after eating
- Avoid straining and constipation
- Elevate the head of your bed 6 to 8 inches
- Avoid stress

Pregnancy, hiatal hernia and taking certain medications, especially some antibiotics and aspirin, all worsen GERD.

People with severe, chronic esophageal reflux or with symptoms not relieved with conventional treatment may need more complete diagnostic testing that includes an upper endoscopy test (looking into the throat with a telescope) or 24-hour esophageal pH test (a small tube through your nose into your esophagus that measures the amount of acid).

**A small percentage of people with chronic GERD may require daily medications or even surgery.**

Your doctor has extensive experience with all of the treatments available for GERD.

Your doctor will be sure that you have no other serious throat problems and will offer advice, medications and/or surgery that specifically targets your problem.

Call for an Appointment:
Adults: 706-721-4400
Children: 706-721-5500