

GERD – DON'T IGNORE THE SYMPTOMS

More Than Just Heartburn

60 million adults experience acid reflux at least once a month

Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) is a chronic digestive disease and occurs when stomach acid flows back into your esophagus, causing irritation of the lining of the esophagus.

Although GERD is a common condition, the damage it may cause can be serious. Please share this guide with your patients to help them understand the symptoms, complications and treatment options for GERD.

01 | Risk Factors & Symptoms

During normal digestion, the lower esophageal sphincter (LES) closes to prevent food and stomach acid from traveling back up into the esophagus. When the LES is weak or doesn't function correctly, acid reflux occurs. Factors that can cause weakness of the LES are obesity, certain medications, smoking and second-hand smoke.

The most common symptoms of GERD are:

- Heartburn & Chest Pain
- Bad Breath
- Nausea & Vomiting
- Problems Swallowing
- Respiratory Problems
- Tooth Erosion

02 | Complications

The severity of GERD can vary and in many cases can be controlled by medication. If you are experiencing the following symptoms, however, you should seek immediate medical attention:

- Forceful or projectile vomiting
- Vomit that contains blood, green or yellow fluid or looks like coffee grounds
- Difficulty or pain when swallowing
- Pain in the mouth or throat when eating

Left untreated, GERD can lead to narrowing or ulcers of the esophagus, or even tissue changes which, in

rare cases, can increase the patient's risk for esophageal cancer. Therefore, GERD symptoms, whether mild or severe, should not be ignored.

03 | Treatment

Typically, your medical provider will first recommend lifestyle and dietary changes in an effort to decrease the amount of reflux and thereby prevent or reduce damage to the esophagus. Other recommendations include:

- Cessation of smoking
- Weight loss
- Elevating the head when sleeping
- Antacid, acid reducer or proton pump inhibitor medication

04 | Living with GERD

As always, following the instructions of your medical provider is critical to the management of GERD. The doctor may suggest additional tests to rule out other diagnoses as well as to monitor the condition of the esophagus. Cooperating with your medical provider as well as the efforts you put forth to make lifestyle and dietary changes can prevent serious complications and slow the progression of damage to the esophagus.

To learn more, visit: <https://www.aboutgerd.org/>

Did You Know?

Approximately 20% of the U.S. population has GERD

References

- <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/gerd/basics/definition/con-20025201>
- <http://www.webmd.com/heartburn-gerd/guide/reflux-disease-gerd-1>