

GASTROESOPHAGEAL REFLUX DISEASE (GERD)

Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) occurs when stomach acid washes upwards into the esophagus. Classic symptoms of GERD include heartburn and/or a sensation of stomach acid coming up towards the throat, sometimes causing a sour taste. Not everyone has these classic symptoms though. In the ENT profession, GERD is manifested by an irritation in the larynx (voice box) and the part of the throat near and around the larynx. Symptoms may present as a foreign body sensation in the throat, hoarseness upon waking up in the morning, as a chronic dry-type cough, throat clearing or may be totally asymptomatic and be noted as an ulcer or redness in the larynx when the physician examines it. Known irritants that exacerbate this condition are: 1) alcoholic beverages; 2) caffeine; 3) chocolate; 4) spicy foods; 5) stress.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Elevate the head of the bed so that it is slanted thirty degrees. This can easily be done by placing 2 x 4 blocks -or a couple of books -under the legs of the headboard. Lying on a pillow will flex the neck, but this will not be helpful. The stomach needs to be lower than the throat.
2. Limiting the intake of food or liquids prior to retiring will decrease the chance of stomach acid washing back up into the esophagus and into the throat. Thus, don't eat or drink two to three hours before going to bed.
3. Taking Tums or antacids before going to bed will be helpful. Your doctor may also recommend an over the counter medication such as omeprazole (Prilosec) OTC. If so, take one per day before meals for at least 30 days. If a stronger medication is needed, a prescription will be provided.
4. If there is an ulceration or a lesion that does not heal, then a direct laryngoscopy and biopsy under anesthesia in the operating room may be indicated to rule out other causes of the ulceration or lesion.
5. If this problem continues and the measures mentioned above are not helpful, then it may be necessary to refer you to a gastroenterologist for further evaluation and treatment, including an upper endoscopy to check the entire esophagus and stomach.