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## Acid Reflux Disease or GERD

Acid reflux or Gastro-esophageal reflux disease occurs when acid from the stomach flows back up into the esophagus. This occurs to some extent in everyone but when these episodes become frequent and or prolonged symptoms occur.

### Symptoms of acid reflux Disease

The most common symptom is heartburn. This is a burning sensation in the middle of your chest but it may be in the lower part of your chest where the chest bone stops. Some patients get a bitter sour taste when this occurs. This is aggravated by eating, bending forward or laying down.

### How it happens

The lower end of the esophagus has a valve like function that opens to let food enter the stomach and when it opens or relaxes acid contents of the stomach can wash back up into the esophagus. In patients with GERD this valve relaxes frequently and at times when it should not relax. Repeated exposure of the esophagus to this acid can not only causes pain but it can lead to breaks in the lining of the esophagus called erosions or ulcers. Ulcers and erosions over time can result in scar formation which in a tube like the esophagus can cause a stricture to form (narrowing of the esophagus). This narrowing can impair the passage of food.

### Treatment of GERD

Several lifestyle changes can help reduce symptoms.

- Avoid large meals
- Avoid late night snacks (no significant food for four hours before sleep or laying down)
- Certain foods can aggravate symptoms (Alcoholic beverages, chocolate, citrus fruits, coffee and tea, fatty fried foods, garlic and onions, peppermint and spearmint, tomatoes or tomato sauce)
- Weight loss may help

### Medications

Your physician may prescribe medication for your symptoms.

- Acid reducing agents some of which can be bought without a prescription
- Prescription acid reducing agents

### Surgical Treatment

The valve can be strengthened or supported by surgical techniques and in some cases correct hiatal hernias at the same time. Surgical therapy should be discussed with a surgeon experienced with this procedure. Risks and benefits concerning surgical treatment should be considered prior to this or any surgery. This treatment can provide relief from acid reflux disease but some patients several years after surgery have to resume medical treatment.