

Patient Information Sheet for GERD (GastroEsophageal Reflux Disease)

Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (or GERD), aka heartburn, is a common condition affecting many people. GERD is characterized by symptoms and/or tissue damage that results from repeated or prolonged exposure of the lining of the esophagus to acidic contents from the stomach and occurs when the lower esophageal sphincter (LES) does not seal off the esophagus from the stomach.

The two most frequently reported symptoms of GERD are heartburn, which can be described as a burning discomfort that begins behind the breastbone and radiates to the neck and throat, and acid regurgitation, which is characterized as a bitter, sour tasting fluid. One out of five people experience heartburn or acid regurgitation on a weekly basis and two out of five people experience heartburn or acid regurgitation at least once a month.

However, some patients may present with atypical symptoms such as a cough, asthma, laryngitis, or chest pain, and other patients with GERD experience no symptoms at all. Studies suggest that approximately one-third of the population has GERD.

Since GERD is a chronic disease instead of an acute illness, it causes significant economic impact due to the expense of the long-term management of the disease. Direct costs associated with the disease include costs of over-the-counter and prescription medications, physician office, dental office and hospital visits, surgical costs and costs of possible complications, such as Barrett's esophagus and esophageal adenocarcinoma, that may result from the disease.

According to a recent study on the burden of chronic gastrointestinal disorders, GERD was found to be the most expensive, with direct and indirect costs totaling \$10 billion per year.[3]

Dental implications can be severe. Reflux is associated with Apnea, tooth erosion, bruxism and TMD. When erosion is present on the chewing surfaces of the teeth that results in fillings that are standing higher than the teeth, or worn circles in the enamel, reflux is almost certainly present. Recession of the gums and sensitive teeth are very likely. In addition, patients are likely to suffer from more cavities, root canals and tooth breakdown.

Children with tooth wear or who grind their teeth at night often have GERD. They may have tooth sensitivity and may require extensive dental work to restore their teeth. It's worth it to fix their baby teeth because they're critical to eating. Remember, the way they grow from 20" to 5'-6" is by nourishing their growing bodies which requires teeth to eat well.

What can be done?

- 1-Stay hydrated. More water will help neutralize stomach acids.
- 2-Eat less acidic foods and drinks. Acidic items include: tomatoes, citrus fruits, berries, apples, vinegary things, soda, energy drinks, Gatorade or other electrolyte replacers, spicy foods, sour things, etc.
- 3-After consuming acidic things, don't brush immediately. Instead, drink some water and wait 30 minutes to brush. Otherwise, the tooth structure, suspended above your tooth will get brushed away and swallowed.
- 4-Use a high fluoride gel or tooth paste. Prevident 5000, ClinPro 5000 and Control Rx are examples of prescription fluorides for home use available at the pharmacy with a prescription or from our dental office.
- 5-Sleep on more than one pillow. This elevates the head and keeps the acid down in the stomach where it belongs.
- 6-Take TUMS or another acid tablet to neutralize acids.
- 7-Take an antacid medication such as prilosec, Zantac H2 Blocker or another prescribed medication under direction of your physician.
- 8-Ask for an upper GI scope to confirm GERD and its damaging effects.