

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT GASTROESOPHAAGEAL REFLUX DISEASE (GERD)

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In gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), stomach acid washes up into the esophagus. The esophagus is the tube that carries food from the mouth to the stomach. GERD can harm the lining of the esophagus and cause what many people call "heartburn" or "acid indigestion." Some people with GERD may also have a cough, a sore throat, breathing problems, trouble swallowing, or bad breath.

Things that can cause GERD or make it worse:

- Pregnancy
- Smoking
- Alcohol
- Being overweight
- Some foods (fatty or fried foods, chocolate, mint, garlic, onions, citrus fruits or juices, carbonated beverages)
- Lying down after eating

How will the doctor know if problems are caused by GERD?

- Your doctor may give you medicine to make you have less stomach acid. If the medicine helps, your problems were probably from GERD and you probably won't need any tests.

- Sometimes you may need a test to measure acid or pressure or to look at the esophagus lining.

Is there a treatment?

- GERD can be treated by stopping the things that make it worse.
- Taking medicines that block stomach acid can also help.

Is GERD dangerous?

- If GERD is not treated, it can cause bleeding or scars that block the esophagus.
- GERD may make changes in the lining of the esophagus called "Barrett's esophagus." Barrett's esophagus can turn into cancer.
- People who have GERD for many years should get checked for Barrett's esophagus.
- Tell your doctor if you have trouble swallowing, weight loss, vomiting, bleeding, loss of appetite, or chest pain.
- In a few cases, an operation may be needed.

For More Information

Web Sites with Good Information on GERD

American College of Physicians: ACP Special Report:
Understanding and Treating Heartburn
http://www.acponline.org/patients_families/pdfs/health/heartburn_report.pdf

National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse: Heartburn,
Hiatal Hernia, and GERD
<http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/ddiseases/pubs/gerd/index.htm>

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