

PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

GERD: Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease and its Prevention

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Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) occurs when stomach contents backflow into the esophagus, such as regurgitation of stomach acid along with undigested food, causing symptoms like heartburn. Heartburn is a burning type of pain that occurs along the center of the chest behind the breastbone and usually occurs after eating. Other symptoms associated with GERD are difficulty swallowing, a cough lasting longer than 3 months, sensation of a lump in the throat, increased saliva, recurrent sore throat, loss of tooth enamel, and nausea. Common causes of GERD include alcohol, smoking, caffeine, certain foods, specific medications, pregnancy, obesity, hiatal hernia, or an anatomic problem with the esophagus. You can prevent GERD by adjusting your diet and avoiding some of the risk factors that worsen acid reflux. It is important to treat GERD and prevent it from worsening to avoid further complications and disease progression.

Preventive measures include:

- Avoiding alcoholic beverages;
- Smoking cessation;
- Avoiding caffeine;
- Losing weight;
- Avoiding acidic foods like citrus, onions, garlic, tomato-based products, peppermint, and chocolate;
- Decreasing consumption of fatty foods;
- Eating smaller, more frequent meals and avoiding lying down for 3-4 hours after a meal;
- Elevating the head of your bed by 8 inches or using an extra pillow;
- Avoiding eating within 3 hours of going to bed; and
- Avoiding medications that worsen GERD symptoms (calcium channel blockers, anticholinergics, nitrates, tricyclic antidepressants, beta-agonists, alpha-adrenergic agonists, theophylline, opioids, barbiturates, and diazepam).

MEDICAL CARE AND TREATMENT OPTIONS:

If you feel sick or have questions about GERD, talk to your osteopathic family physician. They can check whether you might have GERD by reviewing your health history, examining you, and performing the appropriate medical tests, if necessary. Your physician can help you feel better by suggesting changes to your daily routine and potentially prescribing you medicine, known as proton-pump inhibitors, to stop your stomach from making too much acid. Such medications can help prevent the recurrence of GERD and potentially curtail any bad effects related to GERD. If you need help right away, call your doctor or 911.

SOURCE(S):

American Academy of Family Physicians, Medscape, and UpToDate.com.

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