

What you need to know about . . .

GERD

GERD is an abbreviation for gastroesophageal reflux disease. Sometimes it is referred to as acid reflux or heartburn. GERD is a condition where stomach contents flow backwards into the esophagus. Unmanaged GERD can lead to internal bleeding, anemia, aspiration of the stomach contents into the lungs, and esophageal cancer.

Know the risks

These things make GERD more likely:

- Receiving nutrition by a feeding tube;
- Eating a lot of spicy foods, or foods that are acidic or high in fat;
- Eating very quickly and/or overeating;
- Problems with mobility;
- Having scoliosis or body alignment problems;
- Having dysphagia (difficulty swallowing);
- Having a hiatal hernia;
- Reflux can be a side effect of medication;
- Chronic problems with constipation;
- Having a medical condition that causes the stomach to empty more slowly than usual;
- Smoking;
- Drinking a lot of caffeinated and/or carbonated beverages;
- Lying down too soon after eating;
- A diagnosis of seizure disorder.

Know the signs

These are signs that a person may have GERD:

- Burning feeling in the throat, chest, or stomach;
- Regurgitation;
- Persistent hiccups;
- Vomiting;
- Sore throat;
- Hoarse voice;
- Painful or difficulty swallowing;
- Repeated swallowing;
- Blood in stool;
- Drooling;
- Coughing;
- Hand-mouthing.

Know what to do

Prevention strategies:

- Follow the recommended diet. (This may include avoiding fatty foods, caffeine, citrus, carbonated beverages, etc. and eating several smaller meals instead of three big meals.);
- Follow mealtime positioning guidelines – leaning forward or slumping sideways during meals contributes to GERD;
- Follow instructions regarding consistency and texture of food;
- Follow recommendations regarding bed elevation;
- Encourage the person to eat slowly and chew food well;
- Assist the person in staying upright for at least 30 minutes after eating;
- Make sure last meal is at least 2 hours before bedtime;
- Report any changed or worsening symptoms to the nurse.

IN AN EMERGENCY:

Call 9-1-1 immediately if the person:

- vomits blood;
- is having trouble breathing, wheezing, choking, or seems to have an obstructed airway;
- loses consciousness (becomes unresponsive).



State of Georgia
Department of Behavioral Health
and Developmental Disabilities

This GERD Fact Sheet is # 3 in a series of Improving Health Outcomes Fact Sheets. It was developed with reference to resources available through DDHealthInfo.org and the Indiana Bureau of Quality Improvement Services. This Fact Sheet is not a substitute for clinical evaluation or physician's orders.