

Addressing the Symptoms of GERD

Gastroesophageal reflux, which is also known as acid reflux, is one of the most common gastrointestinal disorders in America. Reflux is what happens when stomach acid and/or food refluxes back into the esophagus or mouth. This happens normally in healthy adults but the episodes are usually brief and don't cause symptoms.

When does reflux become a problem?

When people have symptoms associated with reflux, it is called gastroesophageal reflux disease or GERD. The most common symptom is heartburn which causes a burning sensation in the chest that sometimes travels to the throat. Heartburn most often happens after meals and is made worse with lying down, bending or physical exertion. Less common symptoms include stomach pain, difficulty swallowing, painful swallowing, voice hoarseness, sore throat, chronic cough or regurgitation of food or liquid into the mouth.

How to reduce the symptoms of GERD?

Mild symptoms can be treated with lifestyle changes such as losing weight, raising the head of the bed 6-8 inches, and avoiding caffeine, alcohol, spicy and fatty foods. Avoiding large meals and not eating three or more hours before bedtime has also been shown to help.

What are the medications used to treat GERD?

Antacids like Tums® and Maalox® neutralize stomach acid and can provide short-term relief of symptoms in people who occasionally experience acid reflux. Histamine antagonists like ranitidine (Zantac®) and famotidine (Pepcid®) reduce the production of acid in the stomach. They are usually taken once or twice per day and are used by people with mild symptoms.

People with moderate to severe symptoms who have not responded to antacids or histamine antagonists

are treated with proton pump inhibitors (PPIs). PPIs also inhibit acid production in the stomach but are stronger. PPIs include omeprazole (Prilosec®), esomeprazole (Nexium®), and pantoprazole (Protonix®).

Why is it important to treat GERD?

Most people with GERD who are treated adequately will not develop complications. Barrett's esophagus is the most serious complication and occurs when the normal cells of the esophagus are replaced by a different cell type because of repeated damage to the esophagus. These cells have a small risk of changing into cancer cells and an endoscopy needs to be done regularly to ensure that esophageal cancer hasn't formed.

If you have any questions regarding symptoms or treatment of GERD, talk with your provider at your next visit.

Welcome Dr. Felix!

Thunderbird Internal Medicine is proud to welcome Dr. Angela Felix! She earned her doctorate from Des Moines University-Osteopathic Medical Center and recently completed her residency at Banner Good Samaritan Medical Center in Phoenix.

Dr. Felix is a Wisconsin native who is looking forward to creating a close relationship with patients and providing personalized care. She will see patients at our 5620 West Thunderbird Road, suite F-1 office.



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