

The
Pulse

GERD

"I just have to stay away from those spicy foods." "I shouldn't have eaten that pizza at lunch. Now I'll be up all night with heartburn!"

These are comments typically made by men and women who suffer from gastro-esophageal reflux disease or GERD. GERD affects roughly 1 in 5 people in the United States and anyone including infants, children and pregnant women can suffer from it.

During the digestion process, stomach acid leaks back (i.e. refluxes) into the esophagus which connects the mouth to the stomach. In people with GERD, this gastric acid can irritate and/or damage the mucosal lining of the esophagus, pharynx, larynx and/or respiratory tract. The most common GERD related symptoms are:

- Heartburn
- Acid indigestion/ regurgitation
- Pain in the chest
- Hoarseness in the morning
- Difficulty swallowing
- Dry cough
- Bad breath

Depending on the persistence and severity of your GERD symptoms, you may want to see your healthcare provider and/or a specialist (Internist or Gastroenterologist) to receive a formal diagnosis. The current 'gold standard' for evaluating GERD patients is an upper endoscopy, a procedure that involves a physician using an endoscope (thin, flexible tube with a small fiber optic camera) to inspect the esophagus for irritation and damage. After the esophagus has been examined, a formal diagnosis of GERD can be made.

The most common precipitating factors for symptoms of GERD include:

- Alcohol consumption
- Being overweight
- Smoking
- Eating fatty, fried or spicy foods
- Chocolate and mint flavored foods
- Foods and drinks with tomato (tomato juice, soup, pizza, etc.)
- Caffeinated beverages (coffee, tea, colas, etc.)
- Foods with garlic and onion

Depending on your diagnosis, your healthcare provider will discuss making lifestyle changes that may improve your symptoms. Some people will be helped by over-the-counter medications such as antacids (e.g. Alka-Seltzer, Maalox, Mylanta, Pepto-Bismol, Rolaids, etc.) which work by neutralizing stomach acid. Others may need over-the-counter or prescription proton pump inhibitors (e.g. Prilosec, Nexium, Prevacid, Aciphex, Protonix, etc.) which work by inhibiting the production of gastric acids.

Charlottesville Medical Research in conjunction with Dr. Daniel Pambianco, are currently conducting a GERD research study for individuals who experience frequent heartburn symptoms. If you would like more information about this research trial, please contact Charlottesville Medical Research at (434) 817-2442. To date, CMR has performed over 30 GERD/Heartburn research trials in over 350 subjects.

-Nancy D. Bolton, A.N.P., CCRC

20% of the US population experience GERD symptoms weekly¹

1,700 deaths each year are attributable to GERD related disorders¹

3 BILLION dollars are spent each year on antacids²

(Source: ¹National Institutes of Health; ²Primary Care, A Collaborative Practice 2nd Edition, 2003)



Charlottesville Medical Research Current and Future Research Studies

- Osteoarthritis of any joint
- Osteoporosis (starting in June)
- GERD
- Irritable Bowel Syndrome

