



HEALTH NEWS FROM THE DCF MEDICAL TEAM

GERD (Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease)

What is GERD?

GERD, also known as “reflux”, “acid reflux” or “acid regurgitation”, occurs when stomach acid and enzymes rise up from the stomach. The acid causes inflammation that causes a feeling of burning and pain. GERD can occur in infants, children and adults. Occasional reflux is very common; but reflux that occurs, more than a couple of times a week can be GERD and the child should be seen by medical provider.

What Causes GERD?

In infants, it is usually caused by a poorly coordinated gastrointestinal tract. In older children and adults, it is usually the result of the muscles in the opening of the stomach becoming relaxed, allowing stomach acid and food to flow backwards. Other factors that may cause GERD are obesity, overeating, smoking, pregnancy, caffeine or alcohol, fatty or fried foods, tomato based foods, spicy foods and some medications.

What are the symptoms of GERD in children?

- ◆ Symptoms in infants are frequent spitting up, choking, gagging, irritability, excessive hiccups, frequent crying or fussiness.
- ◆ Symptoms in young children are similar to those in adults: stomach pain, vomiting, burping and difficulty swallowing.
- ◆ Other possible symptoms are breathing problems, dry cough, poor weight gain, poor nutrition, frequent or continued vomiting, pain or burning sensation in the lower chest area and nausea

What should you do if a child has GERD?

Management is based on severity, degree of symptoms and presence or absence of complications. A medical provider should see the child and make recommendations. X rays, other tests and seeing a specialist may be recommended. To help decrease symptoms, possible alternatives are:

- ◆ Taking over the counter or prescribed medications as recommended by a healthcare provider;
- ◆ Avoiding foods and liquids that make symptoms worse;
- ◆ Keeping the child in an upright position for at least 30 minutes after meals;
- ◆ Avoiding eating meals 2 to 3 hours before bedtime;
- ◆ For infants, thickening formula or changing from cow’s milk to another milk source and frequent burping during feeding;
- ◆ Providing small frequent meals; or
- ◆ In severe cases where other medical treatments have not worked, or where symptoms have come back after stopping medical therapy, surgery may be recommended.

What are the long term complications of GERD?

Untreated chronic GERD can cause serious medical complications. Persistent irritation can lead to bleeding, ulcers, scarring, ongoing difficulty swallowing, weight loss or increased asthma symptoms.

References: <http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/ddiseases/pubs/gerd>; <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1395762/>; *Nurse’s 5-Minute clinical consult: Diseases – Lippincott Williams & Wilkins 298-299*