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ACID REFLUX: A COMMON THROAT IRRITANT

Do you have to clear your throat or cough often? Are you hoarse? Do you have difficulty swallowing? If you have these or other throat symptoms, you may have acid reflux (when stomach acid washes up and irritates your throat). Although its symptoms can be troubling, acid reflux is rarely life threatening. The following information will describe how you can work with your doctor to control acid reflux.

THROAT SYMPTOMS

Although throat symptoms can be felt at any time, you may notice them most when you are lying down or in the morning. You may have acid reflux if you have one or more of the following symptoms:

- Frequent need to clear your throat
- Mucus or phlegm in your throat
- Feeling like you're choking
- Chronic cough
- Hoarseness
- Trouble swallowing
- Sensation of having a "lump in the throat"
- Reoccurring sore throat
- Sour or acid taste i.e. "heartburn"

WHY YOU HAVE THROAT SYMPTOM

At both ends of the **esophagus** (the tube that carries food to the stomach) are the **esophageal sphincters** (ring-like bands). These muscle bands relax to let

food pass, then tighten to keep stomach acid down. When the lower esophageal sphincter (LES) doesn't tighten enough, acid can reflux (backflow) from the stomach into the esophagus. This may or may not cause "heartburn". If the upper esophageal sphincter (UES) also doesn't work well, acid can travel higher and enter your throat (pharynx or larynx). In many cases, this causes throat symptoms.

STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

You can ease your symptoms by making some simple diet and lifestyle changes. If needed, your doctor will also suggest medications that may help.

DIET AND LIFESTYLE CHANGES

To control acid reflux, you will need to make some basic diet and lifestyle changes. The simple steps outlined below may be all you will need to relieve the discomfort.

Watch What You Eat:

Changing your eating habits may help reduce stomach acid. Try these tips:

- Avoid fatty foods and spicy foods.
- Eat fewer acidic foods, such as citrus and tomato-based foods.
- Limit drinking alcohol, caffeine, and fizzy beverages. All increase acid reflux.
- Try limiting chocolate. Eating it bothers some people.

Watch When You Eat:

When you eat is also important:

- Eat dinner 3 or 4 hours before you lie down.
- Do not snack after dinner.

Raise Your Head:

Raising your head and upper body by 6" to 8" helps limit reflux when you are lying down. Place a foam wedge under the head of your

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mattress; or, put blocks under the head of the bed frame to raise it.

Other Changes:

Here are some other ways to help control acid reflux:

- Lose weight, if needed.
- Don't exercise near bedtime.
- Avoid tight-fitting clothes, such as pants or pantyhose with tight waistbands.
- Limit aspirin and ibuprofen. They may increase stomach irritation. Take with food.
- Stop smoking.
- Drink sips of water if you have the urge to cough or clear your throat.

MEDICATION FOR ACID REFLUX

Along with diet and lifestyle changes, your doctor may prescribe medication to help treat your acid reflux. Medications will be based on your symptoms and the results of any tests.

REDUCING STOMACH ACID

Your doctor may suggest antacids that you can buy over the counter (i.e. Tums). Or you may be told to take a type of medication called an H-2 blocker. These are available over the counter and by prescription (for higher doses). Examples of these are: ranitidine (Zantac) and famotidine (Pepcid).

BLOCKING STOMACH ACID

In more severe cases, your doctor may suggest a stronger medication called a hydrogen ion

pump inhibitor. These keep the stomach from making acid. In most cases, they are prescribed for short-term use, generally for 8 weeks, and some are available over the counter. Examples of these are omeprazole (Prilosec) 20 mg or 40 mg, lansoprazole (Prevacid) 15 mg or 30 mg, Nexium, Protonix, and Aciphex. These must be taken 30 minutes **prior** to meals.

OTHER MEDICATION

If medications to reduce or block stomach acid do not work, you may be switched to another type of medication or combination. Some work to strengthen the UES and LES. Some help the stomach empty better.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Sometimes other conditions (such as pregnancy) can increase symptoms of acid reflux. If symptoms do not respond to medication, further tests or treatment may be needed. To pinpoint the cause of your symptoms and to rule out more serious health problems, you may be referred to a gastroenterologist (GI physician) for a direct view of the esophagus and stomach called an EGD.

If You Are Pregnant

Acid reflux is fairly common in pregnant women. Watching your diet and elevating your head and upper body while sleeping often help. Acid reflux should lessen after delivery. Always check with

your obstetrician before trying any kind of medication.

GETTING COMFORTABLE AGAIN

You hold the key to controlling reflux. Work with your doctor. Also, follow the diet and lifestyle changes detailed above. In this way, you can help free yourself of coughing, hoarseness, and other throat symptoms.

And Remember...

Be sure to take any medications as directed. Also, schedule a follow-up visit with your doctor to review the progress of your treatment.