

DDD PREVENTION BULLETIN

GASTROESOPHAGEAL REFLUX DISEASE (GERD)



Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease, or GERD, is a very common disorder. Gastroesophageal refers to the stomach and the esophagus. Reflux refers to the back-flow of acidic or non-acidic stomach contents into the esophagus. It occurs when the esophageal defenses are overwhelmed by stomach contents that reflux into the esophagus. A band of muscles at the junction of the stomach and esophagus called the lower esophageal sphincter (LES) normally acts, in conjunction with the diaphragm, as a barrier to prevent reflux of stomach contents into the esophagus. If that barrier is relaxed at inappropriate times or is otherwise compromised, reflux occurs.

There is no known single cause of GERD, however, lifestyle or behavioral factors can stress the LES and contribute to its failure. These factors include:

- Obesity
- Smoking
- Alcohol use
- A high-fat diet
- Consumption of carbonated beverages

People with IDD with the following diagnosis are at higher risk:

- GERD is very common, affecting up to 1 in 5 or more adult men and women in the U.S. population. It also occurs in children. Although common, the disease often is unrecognized – its symptoms are misunderstood. This is unfortunate because GERD is generally a treatable disease, though serious complications can result if not treated properly.



People with developmental disabilities are at high risk for GERD due to some of these characteristics:

- Dysphagia Diagnosis
- Anatomic abnormalities
- Impaired Mobility/ Immobility
- Need for Positioning/ Repositioning
- Dependency on others for feeding
- Medication side effects



Signs and Symptoms:

- Heartburn is the most frequent, which is a burning discomfort that begins behind the breastbone and radiates to the neck and throat.
- Acid regurgitation (refluxed material into the mouth)
- Bad breath
- A sour taste
- Belching
- Difficulty or pain when swallowing
- Water brash (sudden excess of saliva)
- Dysphagia
- The sensation of food sticking in the esophagus
- Chronic sore throat
- Laryngitis
- Inflammation of the gums
- Erosion of the enamel of the teeth
- Chronic irritation in the throat
- Hoarseness in the morning



Treatment:

It is essential for individuals who suffer the chronic and recurrent symptoms of GERD to seek an accurate diagnosis, work with their physician, and receive the most effective treatment available. Various methods to treat GERD range from lifestyle measures to the use of medication or surgical procedures.

Prevention and Management of GERD:

Reduction of symptoms can be achieved in most individuals with several behavioral and lifestyle modifications. These include:

- Weight loss
- Avoidance of carbonated beverages
- Smoking Cessation
- Reducing alcohol and caffeine intake
- Avoiding “trigger” foods (spicy foods, citrus, or acidic foods)
- Maintaining a low-fat diet
- Avoiding eating or drinking several hours before going to bed
- Remaining upright immediately after eating
- Elevating the head of the bed at night