



Rx Focus

Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease

One of the unfortunate consequences of the holidays are stomach aches. People who suffer from GERD or gastroesophageal reflux disease will have to deal with the pain and discomfort of their disease, while they eat their turkey and mashed potatoes.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services indicates that 7 million people in the U.S. suffer from GERD. This disease afflicts people from every socioeconomic, ethnic and age groups. However, the incidence does seem to increase quite dramatically above the age of 40. Greater than 50 percent of those afflicted with GERD are between the ages of 45-64 (both male and female).

What exactly is GERD? GERD occurs when acid from the stomach regurgitates or refluxes into the esophagus. The

acid can inflame and damage the lining of the esophagus in some patients. Almost everyone will experience acid reflux in their lifetime, but people with the disease suffer from acid reflux chronically. Once treatment has begun and the esophagus heals, the patient must stay on the medication or the injury will return with in a few months. Certain conditions make a person susceptible to GERD. When a woman is pregnant GERD can be a serious problem. People with sclerodema or mixed connective tissue disease are more prone to develop GERD.

The primary symptoms of GERD are heartburn, regurgitation and nausea. Other complication such as ulcers, strictures, and Barrett's esophagus can also occur.

Heartburn occurs when nerve fibers are stimulated from acid reflux. Patients normally describe heartburn as a burning pain in the middle of the chest. Patients tend to experience more heartburn when they lie down because of the effects of gravity.

Regurgitation is common while nausea is not as frequent. When refluxed liquid appears in the mouth regurgitation has occurred. Sometimes the liquid can contain food. Nausea is infrequent, but in some patients it can result in vomiting.

Ulcers can occur when liquid from the stomach damages the lining of the esophagus. The body then attempts to heal the inflammation caused by the acid. An ulcer is a break in the lining of the esophagus. Esophageal bleeding can occur and in severe cases, the bleeding may require blood transfusion.

During the healing process, scars can occur and can shrink and narrow the lumen of the esophagus. This scarred narrowing is called a stricture. Food can get stuck in the esophagus. When strictures occur, endoscopic removal is required. After the food is removed the narrowing must be stretched.

Approximately ten percent of patients with GERD will get Barrett's esophagus. Barrett's esophagus is associated with esophageal cancer. Cancer can occur because the cells of the esophagus are constantly exposed to acid. The acid changes the cells and the cell can become cancerous. Patients with Barrett's esophagus require periodic surveillance endoscopies with biopsies. If the physician finds cancerous cells, the patient may receive cancer treatment.

November Health Observances

National Alzheimer's Disease Month

Sponsored by the Alzheimer's Association
www.alz.org

National American Diabetes Month

Sponsored by the American Association of Diabetes Educators
www.diabetes.org

National Epilepsy Awareness Month

Sponsored by the Epilepsy Foundation
www.epilepsyfoundation.org

National Hospice Month

Sponsored by the Hospice Association of America
www.hospice-america.org

National Lung Cancer Awareness Month

Sponsored by Cancer Care and the Oncology Nursing Society
www.lungcancer.org

The risk of getting cancer if a person has Barrett's esophagus is less than 1 percent (0.4 percent to 0.5 percent) per year.

GERD is treated by both medication and life style changes. Patients with GERD are told to elevate their body at night in order to decrease the amount of reflux. Certain foods are known to reduce the pressure in the lower esophageal sphincter and thereby promote reflux. Foods that they should avoid include chocolate, peppermint, alcohol, and caffeinated drinks.

Medications for GERD include antacids, histamine antagonists, and proton pump inhibitors. Antacids help to neutralize the acid in the stomach so that there is no acid to reflux. They are available over the counter (OTC) and are taken after a meal. Histamine antagonists block the histamine receptor and thereby prevent histamine from stimulating the acid-producing cells. This type of medication is also available both OTC and by prescription, but must be taken 30 minutes before meals. The best medication for treating GERD is a proton pump inhibitor (PPI). PPI's shut off acid production for a longer period of time than histamine antagonists. This type of medication is best taken one hour before meals. PPI's are available as both OTC and by prescription. Prilosec is a common PPI that is now available OTC. The FDA approved Prilosec OTC in June of 2003 and recommended that Prilosec OTC is for persons who have chronic heartburn.

They also suggested that people who do not have relief of their symptoms after 14 days should contact their health provider. Consumers should not take a 14-day course of Prilosec OTC more often than every four months for frequent heartburn unless directed by a doctor.

References:

1. www.aboutgerd.org
2. www.gerd.com
3. www.medicinet.com



Industry Report

Flu Vaccine Shortage

On October 5th, the Chiron Corporation, a British company, notified the Center for Diseases Control that none of it's influenza vaccine (Fluvirin) would be available for distribution in the United States for the 2004-05 influenza season. The Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Agency (MHRA) in the United Kingdom suspended Chiron's manufacturing license of the flu vaccine. In August, Chiron announced that millions of flu vaccines made in Liverpool were contaminated. A company spokesman was surprised at the MHRA decision because after the contamination incident extensive safety tests and safety checks had been carried out on the vaccines.

Chiron's suspended license has a great impact on the U.S. The U.S. depends on Chiron for half of the flu vaccines that are distributed in the U.S. Because of the shortage, the CDC has issued recommendations for influenza vaccination during the 2004-05 season. Certain people have priority over other groups for the vaccination. These people include: all children aged 6-23 months; adults aged 65 years and older; persons aged 2-64 years with underlying chronic medical conditions; all women who will be pregnant during the influenza season; residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities; children aged 6 months-18 years on chronic aspirin therapy; health-care workers involved in direct patient care; and out-of-home caregivers and household contacts of children aged <6 months. The CDC wants to make sure that the people who would benefit the most from the vaccine receive it first.

Resources:

1. www.cdc.gov
2. www.newsvote.bbc.co



New Generic Approvals

Citalopram Hydrobromide

Approved: 10/29/2004

Brand Name Equivalent: Celexa

Approved Indication: Depression



CBCA Pharmacy Benefits Management
675 Foxon Road, Suite 204
East Haven CT 06513
Phone: (800) 936-1193
Fax: (203) 468-8416