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Talking to Your Doctor About GERD

Symptoms of GERD vary from person to person. The majority of people with GERD have mild symptoms, with no visible evidence of tissue damage and little risk of developing complications.

Periodic heartburn is a symptom that many people experience. If it occurs occasionally just after a meal, and less than once per week, it is likely a "benign" condition. Heartburn that occurs more frequently than once a week, becomes more severe, or occurs at night and wakes a person from sleep, may be a sign of a more serious condition and consultation with a physician is advised.

When you visit your doctor you will want to know what is wrong, what the physician can do to treat it, and what you can do to better manage it. Your physician will begin by taking a history asking for a description of the symptoms as well as possible factors that can bring them on or make them better. This will be followed by a physical examination, possibly diagnostic tests, a diagnosis, and a discussion of treatment options.

Preparing For Your Appointment

Before your appointment, be prepared to provide your doctor with the following information:

- List of when your heartburn occurs (time of day, after meals, etc.)
- The severity of your heartburn
- How often your heartburn occurs (per week)
- Other symptoms
- How your symptoms affect your daily activities
- How your symptoms affect your sleep
- What diet and lifestyle changes you have made to relieve your symptoms
- If these diet and lifestyle changes have been effective in providing relief
- What antacids and other over-the-counter medications you have used
- What relief (if any) these medications have provided

Questions To Ask Your Doctor

Here are some questions to ask your doctor during your appointment:

- How can I tell the difference between simple heartburn and a more serious condition?
- Do I have GERD?
- How is GERD treated?
- What medications are available for GERD?
- Is there a cure?
- How can I manage my symptoms?
- What happens if my symptoms become worse?

Like other chronic diseases, managing GERD can be a challenge. Effective management is often dependent on a successful patient-doctor relationship. Although the time you spend with your doctor may be limited, you can help ensure that effective two-way communication takes place during your visit by being prepared.

[Source: IFFGD web page at http://www.aboutgerd.org/site/about-gerd/treatment/doctor-tips/]

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This article is in no way intended to replace the knowledge or diagnosis of your doctor. We advise seeing a physician whenever a health problem arises requiring an expert's care.

IFFGD is a nonprofit education and research organization. Our mission is to inform, assist, and support people affected by gastrointestinal disorders. For more information, or permission to reprint this article, write to IFFGD, 700 W. Virginia St., #201, Milwaukee, WI 53204. Call toll-free (in the U.S.): 888-964-2001 or 414-964-1799. Visit our websites at: www.iffgd.org or www.aboutgerd.org.