



## **HEARTBURN** **GASTROESOPHAGEAL REFLUX DISEASE (GERD)**

The following lifestyle modifications are the cornerstone of initial GERD therapy and are important in the treatment of all patients with GERD.

1. Do not eat any food for 2-3 hours before bedtime or lying down. This means absolutely no snacks or drinks. The stomach does not know the difference between a glass of water or a steak dinner. Anything that you put in your stomach causes the production of digestive acids.
2. Normal digestion depends on the action of a muscular ring at the lower end of the esophagus called the lower esophageal sphincter (LES). When you swallow food the LES opens to allow the food into the stomach. It then closes quickly to prevent food and stomach contents from returning to the esophagus. If the LES remains open abnormally, or opens intermittently at the wrong times, stomach contents and acids can reflux back into the esophagus. Avoid foods which irritate the stomach and esophagus or cause relaxation of the LES such as spicy, acidic, fatty foods, caffeine, tomato products, chocolate and peppermint.
3. Avoid large meals which cause an increase in reflux of stomach contents into the esophagus.
4. Reduce weight if too heavy.
5. The head of the body should be elevated 6 to 8 inches while sleeping by the use of blocks under the upper legs or by a wedge on the bed itself. Pillows are not an effective alternative for elevating a person's upper body and reducing reflux since only the head itself is usually elevated.
6. Avoid potentially harmful medications if your health allows. Some medications used to treat asthma cause decrease in the lower esophageal sphincter contributing to an increase in reflux. Aspirin and many over-the counter pain relievers such as ibuprofen can also cause injury to the lining of the esophagus and stomach, especially when they are already inflamed. Iron and potassium tablets and some antibiotics can also cause injury to an inflamed esophagus.

Life style modifications are helpful, but medical treatment of reflux disease may be necessary. Medications may:

**Neutralize acid** – Maalox, Mylanta

**Stop the production of acid** – Prevacid, Zantac, Nexium, Prilosec, Pepcid