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GASTRIC REFLUX

BACKGROUND

Stomach acid is relatively concentrated hydrochloric acid but the stomach's lining is especially well-suited for this acid; on the other hand, the lining of the throat, the swallowing tube (esophagus) and the lungs can be injured by such acid. When everything is working properly, a valve at the junction of the esophagus and the stomach allows food to enter the stomach but prevents the acid from coming up (reflux).

Many patients reflux stomach acid as a result of several factors including:

- ** Hiatus hernia (malfunction of the stomach valve).
- ** Obesity (overweight) and poor eating habits.

Poor eating habits which can make reflux worse includes:

- ** Eating foods or drinks which produce a lot of gas such as tonic. Eating and drinking substances that increase acid output itself such as coffee and tea. In addition, smoking cigarettes increases the likelihood of reflux.

Reflux of stomach acid into the esophagus can cause heartburn (chest pain). Into the throat, it can produce laryngitis, hoarseness, sore throat and cough, as well as an increase in the production of phlegm. If acid actually refluxes into lungs, chronic cough and pulmonary conditions can result, including pneumonia.

To reduce the likelihood of reflux, and to improve your condition, your doctor makes the following recommendations:

- ** Smoking irritates the condition, stop if possible.
- ** No food or drinking within three hours before bedtime or lying down to rest. This includes lying down anytime, such as an afternoon nap. You may drink water anytime.
- ** Avoid overeating. Overfilling the stomach increases the likelihood of reflux. It is better to eat several small meals each day, than one or two big meals.
- ** Reduce your intake of foods which produce gas and which increase stomach acid production. Specifically, reduce the consumption of fatty and fried foods, chocolate, tonic, spicy foods, coffee, tea, and alcoholic beverages. You may have water, decaffeinated herbal tea, apple juice, and grape juice.

USE LIQUID ANTACIDS ONLY. Either Maalox, Mylanta, Gelusil or Amphojel. TAKE ONE TABLESPOON ONE HOUR AFTER MEALS AND TWO TABLESPOONS BEFORE BED. Some antacids (Maalox) can make your stools loose, others (Amphojel) can bind you. You may want to try different antacids or even alternate the use on alternate days. If you have any questions about this, ask your doctor or pharmacist.

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