



GASTRO-ESOPHAGEAL REFLUX DISEASE (GERD)

What is GERD?

GERD is caused by the washing back (reflux) of acidic stomach juices, which are used to digest food, into the esophagus (the tube that carries food from the mouth to the stomach). This occurs because the muscular valve at the bottom of the esophagus (lower esophageal sphincter – LES), where the esophagus joins the top of the stomach, fails to work properly. The LES normally keeps stomach acid out of the esophagus. However, in GERD, the LES relaxes and allows stomach acid to flow up into the esophagus and cause pain, inflammation and sometimes corrosion or ulceration. Heartburn and acid regurgitation are the most common symptom associated with GERD.

The Prevalence of GERD in Hong Kong

Although the prevalence of GERD in Asia used to be considerably lower than in Western countries, there is a rising trend of GERD in Asia. In Hong Kong, according to a survey by the University of Hong Kong 8.9% of Hong Kong people suffer from GERD symptoms at least monthly. It is most common in adults over age 40, but virtually anyone can get GERD, even infants. GERD sufferers experience higher levels of anxiety and depression, which in turn, affect their normal social lives.

How to cure GERD?

Heartburn and GERD have physical causes and are rarely curtailed by lifestyle modifications alone. GERD sufferers need medication to alleviate their symptoms. Reflux usually recurs if treatment is stopped.

The latest treatment of GERD is a proton pump inhibitor (PPI). Stomach acid helps digest food. The lining of the stomach contains millions of specialized cells that produce acid via “proton pumps”. PPI turns off some of the “proton pumps”. By reducing acid production in the stomach, PPI reduces the chance of acid backing up into the esophagus causing reflux symptoms.

How to diagnose GERD?

Medical experts from the University of Hong Kong have developed a simple and effective new diagnostic tool to quickly and easily diagnose a medical condition called GERD.

The new GERD diagnostic tool is a user-friendly questionnaire. It asks seven easy-to-understand questions that allow doctors to easily judge whether a patient is afflicted with GERD. The tool avoids the need for unnecessary, unpleasant and costly endoscopies, which involve doctors inserting a tube down the patient’s throat to examine the affected areas. The questionnaire is very reliable. 82% of patients diagnosed with GERD through the questionnaire were confirmed to have the condition in follow up tests.

(Attach 7 questions)

The questionnaire consists of 7 questions using a 5-point-scale to rank the severity and frequencies of symptoms of GERD. If the cumulative results equals or exceed 12 points, the patient is likely to have GERD.