



Comparing Health Care Choices

Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)

Do you have GERD?

The esophagus is the tube that carries food from the throat to the stomach. The stomach makes acid to digest the food. Sometimes the acid can back up into the esophagus. This can cause symptoms such as heartburn or even a sour taste in your mouth. When it happens often and over a long period of time, it is called GERD.

Many people have heartburn once in awhile. Others have GERD that is not too bad. They can keep it under control by lifestyle changes. Antacids or other over-the-counter medicines can also help.

This information is for people who have more severe GERD and are being treated by a doctor or other health care provider. Take this information with you when you and your provider decide how to treat your GERD.

What kinds of medicines can I take for GERD?

Most medicines to treat GERD work to lower the acid level in the stomach. The two main types of prescription medicines are:

- ▶ H2 receptor antagonists, or H2RAs. Examples are Axid, Pepcid, Tagamet, and Zantac.
- ▶ Proton pump inhibitors, or PPIs. Examples are AcipHex, Nexium, Prevacid, Prilosec OTC, and Protonix. Generic omeprazole is also available.

The PPIs work better than the H2RA medicines in treating GERD. But PPIs are more likely to cause side effects such as headache or diarrhea.

Studies show that, overall, each PPI works about as well as another for relieving symptoms.

Can surgery help?

Surgery can be performed to treat GERD. In the surgery, the top part of the stomach is wrapped around the lower part of the esophagus. This helps to keep acid from washing up from the stomach.

The common side effects of surgery are difficulty swallowing and bloating. Rare but more serious problems can occur.

Prescription medicines alone work about as well as surgery for relieving symptoms. Some people who have surgery still need to take medicine.

What about the new endoscopic procedures?

An endoscope is a tube that goes through the mouth into the esophagus. Using this scope, doctors can treat the lower part of the esophagus to improve how it works. These nonsurgical procedures are somewhat new. There is not enough scientific evidence yet to talk about how well they work.

For more information

These findings come from a report that compares treatments for GERD. You can find the report at www.effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov.

You can find more information on GERD at www.healthfinder.gov. It will give you links to Web sites about health from many government and nonprofit groups.

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