



Health Bulletin



Burning Questions About Digestive Health

(NAPSA)—Despite the fact that heartburn, acid reflux disease and GERD have been in the news a lot lately, most people don't understand the difference.

Here are answers to some of the most common questions.

Q: What is the difference between acid reflux, heartburn and GERD?

A: While most people use the names interchangeably, there is a difference. Acid reflux is a condition in which stomach acid flows back, or refluxes, into the esophagus.

Heartburn is the burning feeling people get when this acid contacts the lining of the esophagus, which is more delicate than the stomach lining.

Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) is a chronic condition marked by persistent heartburn and other uncomfortable symptoms such as belching two or more days per week, despite diet changes and trying over-the-counter medications. GERD is also called acid reflux disease. In some people, if there is damage to the esophagus, this condition is called erosive GERD. GERD and erosive GERD can only be diagnosed by a doctor.

Q: What is stomach acid? Why does it go where it doesn't belong?

A: Stomach acid, which helps in the digestion of food, is usually not a problem when it stays where it belongs—in the stomach. A valve between the esophagus and the stomach allows food to move from the esophagus to the stomach. In people with acid reflux, this valve



does not always work the way it should, either because it relaxes too frequently, or because it's weakened.

The result is stomach acid coming back up—and into contact with the esophagus.

Q: Which symptoms are associated with acid reflux disease?

A: Symptoms of acid reflux disease may be the body's warning that stomach acid is refluxing into the esophagus—and, in some people, is possibly causing damage. Common symptoms include:

- Heartburn, a burning discomfort behind the chest that moves up toward the throat and tends to worsen after eating, when lying down after eating or when bending over
- Regurgitation, a bitter or sour taste of acid at the back of the throat
- Frequent burping

Q: What may help ease the burn?

A: Sometimes people can reduce heartburn and other symptoms of acid reflux disease by

making the following lifestyle changes:

- Avoid smoking
- Eat meals at least two to three hours before bedtime or naps
- Avoid foods and beverages that may contribute to heartburn (i.e., chocolate, coffee, peppermint, greasy or spicy foods, tomato products and alcoholic beverages)
- Try eating four to five smaller meals, rather than the standard three
- Wear loose-fitting, comfortable garments
- Elevate the head of the bed
- Maintain a healthy weight

Q: How is GERD treated?

A: A chronic condition such as acid reflux disease should be discussed with and diagnosed by a doctor. Doctors can prescribe treatments such as ACIPHEX® (rabeprazole sodium) to provide steady acid control that helps the body help itself.

ACIPHEX, a proton pump inhibitor, works by decreasing the production of acid in the stomach. ACIPHEX is indicated for the treatment of symptomatic GERD, healing of erosive GERD, maintenance of healed erosive GERD and symptoms related to these conditions.

ACIPHEX has a well-established safety record. The most common side effect possibly related to ACIPHEX is headache. Symptom relief does not rule out other serious stomach conditions. Patients also on warfarin (such as Coumadin®) may need to be monitored more closely by their doctor.