



spotlight on health

Heartburn Or Heart Attack?

Don't Let GERD Send You To The Emergency Department

(NAPSA)—More than 5 million people with chest pain are admitted to emergency departments each year. It is estimated that over half of these patients suffer from what is known as non-cardiac chest pain (NCCP). Many of these patients, up to 60 percent, will ultimately be diagnosed with GERD (gastroesophageal reflux disease) as the cause of this NCCP.

It is estimated that more than 21 million Americans suffer from GERD. Many people suffer silently, blaming their symptoms on lifestyle or eating habits, which may not be the cause of the problem.

GERD is a disease that occurs when the band of muscle located at the lower end of the esophagus (called the lower esophageal sphincter) malfunctions—allowing harsh stomach acid to back up into the esophagus. This is what causes the burning feeling of heartburn. Symptoms of GERD may include frequent and persistent heartburn two or more days per week, coughing, difficulty swallowing and a sour or acidic aftertaste in the mouth.

To educate people about GERD and how it can be diagnosed and treated, the International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders (IFFGD) has partnered with the American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP) to encourage people experiencing symptoms of GERD to speak to their doctor before symptoms get so severe that they may warrant a visit to the emergency department.

“GERD is the most common abnormality associated with unexplained chest pain,” said Philip O. Katz, M.D., Kimbel Professor and Chairman, Department of Medicine at the Graduate Hospital in Philadelphia. “The important thing is for sufferers to speak to their physicians at the onset of symptoms.”

“Emergency physicians see many people in the emergency department frightened that they are having a heart attack when they actually have a severe case of heartburn,” said Robert W. Schafermeyer, M.D., president of the American College of Emergency Physicians. “People with GERD can avoid this type of disabling pain with proper medical treatment. However, anyone who is experiencing severe chest or abnormal pain should immedi-

Know The Symptoms Of GERD

- Frequent or persistent heartburn more than twice a week
- Acidic or sour aftertaste in the mouth
- Difficulty swallowing; coughing
- Disabling chest pain

If you experience any of these symptoms speak to your physician to avoid future complications. Call the IFFGD at 1-888-964-2001 for more information and support.



ately seek medical attention.”

In addition to the possibility of experiencing severe chest pain, untreated GERD may lead to more serious conditions such as erosion of the esophagus or even Barrett's esophagus, a pre-cancerous condition.

“We encourage people suffering from heartburn to call the IFFGD hotline,” said Nancy Norton, president of the International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders. “Heartburn associated with GERD can dramatically impact a person's quality of life and can prevent people from enjoying the simple things like food they love.”

Those people suffering from the symptoms of GERD can call IFFGD at 1-888-964-2001 (Monday-Friday 9:30 AM to 6:00 PM EST) to receive information and support regarding the condition. Informational materials are available, including a free seven-day food diary, which can be used to keep track of specific food items and circumstances related to episodes of heartburn. The diary can serve as a valuable tool when discussing symptoms with a physician.

ACEP is a national emergency medicine medical specialty society with more than 22,000 members. ACEP is committed to improving the quality of emergency care through continuing education, research, and public education. For more health information, visit ACEP's Web site at www.acep.org.

IFFGD is a nonprofit education and research organization whose mission it is to inform, assist and support people affected by gastrointestinal disorders. For more information on IFFGD visit their Web site at www.iffgd.org. To learn more about GERD, visit www.aboutgerd.org.