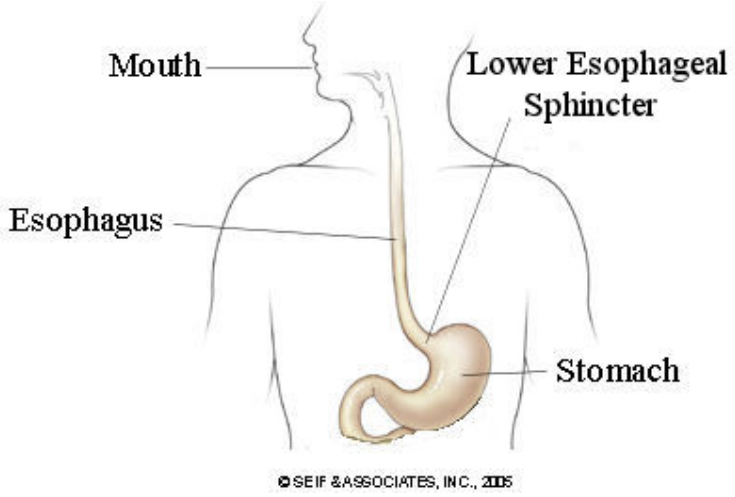
Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)

Your caregiver has diagnosed your chest discomfort as caused by gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD). GERD is caused by a reflux of acid from your stomach into the digestive tube between your mouth and stomach (*esophagus*). Acid in contact with the esophagus causes soreness (*inflammation*) resulting in heartburn or chest pain. It may cause small holes in the lining of the esophagus (*ulcers*).



CAUSES

- Increased body weight puts pressure on the stomach, making acid rise.
- Smoking increases acid production.
- Alcohol decreases pressure on the valve between the stomach and esophagus (*lower esophageal sphincter*), allowing acid from the stomach into the esophagus.
- Late evening meals and a full stomach increase pressure and acid production.
- Lower esophageal sphincter is malformed.
- Sometimes, no reason is found.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Change the factors that you can control. Weight, smoking, or alcohol changes may be difficult to change on your own. Your caregiver can provide guidance and medical therapy.
- Raising the head of your bed may help you to sleep.
- Over-the-counter medicines will decrease acid production. Your caregiver can also prescribe medicines for this. Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver.
- 1/2 to 1 teaspoon of an antacid taken every hour while awake, with meals, and at bedtime, can neutralize acid.
- **DO NOT** take aspirin, ibuprofen, or other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs).

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- The pain changes in location (radiates into arms, neck, jaw, teeth, or back), intensity, or duration.
- You start feeling sick to your stomach (*nauseous*), start throwing up (*vomiting*), or sweating *(diaphoresis*).
- You develop left arm or jaw pain.
- You develop pain going into your back, shortness of breath, or you pass out.
- There is vomiting of fluid that is green, yellow, or looks like coffee grounds or blood.

These symptoms could signal other problems, such as heart disease.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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