



Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease

What is Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)?

- GERD occurs when the contents of the stomach are regurgitated back up into the mouth
- Common and normal in babies (spit up), but after age one should no longer occur
- Acid content of the stomach (pH <4) can damage throat (esophageal) lining as well as teeth
- Chronic, untreated GERD can lead to throat cancer later on in adulthood

What are the symptoms of GERD?

- Child reports a burning or acidic taste in mouth
- Child reports frequent "hot burps" or "baby vomit"
- Child reports burning in the area of heart or stomach ache
- Child has frequent belching after meals
- Child displays "neck stretching" after eating – trying to prevent reflux
- Child continuously coughs during sleep (usually GERD, not asthma)
- Child has chronic hoarseness/laryngitis/pharyngitis
- Child reports that it is painful to swallow

What will GERD do to teeth?

- Enamel erosion (pot holes or moon craters from stomach acid washing over the teeth)
- Tooth sensitivity can develop once the enamel covering is gone
- Acid reflux can make untreated cavities worse
- Acid environment in mouth encourages overgrowth of acid loving, cavity causing bacteria
- Dental fillings appear taller than surrounding tooth (fillings will not erode as fast as enamel)
- In severe cases, tooth nerve can become exposed (OUCH!)

What can be done?

- Avoid fried foods, spicy foods, acidic juices (OJ, lemonade), and sodas
- Avoid over eating and eating too fast---chew your food well
- Avoid sour candies that will further erode enamel
- Do not lie down after eating or eat near bedtime (the stomach needs 2 hours to empty)
- Put a 2X4 plank under the head of the bed (to elevate the esophagus slightly)
- Use fluoride treatments, sealants, or fillings to protect remaining teeth
- Consult with a pediatrician
 - Medications to prevent reflux (Zantac, Prevacid, Prilosec, Reglan, or Nexium)
 - Tums (sugar free)
 - Referral to GI specialist for diagnostic testing (endoscopy, pH probe, etc)
 - Surgical correction (Nissen fundoplication/ pyloroplasty)