



Help for Heartburn & GERD

By Peter Janu, MD, FACS, Fox Valley Surgical Specialists

Heartburn and gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) are commonly confused as the same thing. GERD is actually a chronic condition of the digestive system that affects millions of people from babies to adults, while heartburn is one symptom of GERD.

Both can take a toll on the body and negatively affect quality of life.

There's good news though in that these conditions are very treatable. The first step is seeing a provider to discuss your symptoms and get a diagnosis. When going in for an appointment, be sure to mention all symptoms – these can range from heartburn, indigestion, a sour/bitter taste in the mouth and bloating to more serious things like swallowing difficulties and regurgitation. Your provider will take the individual symptoms you're experiencing into account and likely do some further testing to get a closer look at what's going on inside your stomach. The typical diagnostic tests performed are endoscopic exams and X-rays.

If you are diagnosed with GERD, it can sometimes be managed through lifestyle changes like adjusting your diet to avoid certain symptom-triggering foods. Over-the-counter and/or prescription medications can also be effective for many who are suffering from GERD.

When these solutions don't adequately address the problem, there are some state-of-the-art, minimally invasive outpatient procedures that can treat GERD. Thanks to the latest advances in technology, two that I specialize in and regularly perform have a very low rate of complications/side effects and also involve minimal recovery time post-surgery. They are very successful in treating symptoms for the long term, too. These include:

- **Transoral Incisionless Fundoplication (TIF)** – an incisionless procedure that wraps a portion of the stomach around the esophagus and helps lengthen, strengthen and tighten the muscle so acid stops backing up and leaking into the throat
- **Magnetic Sphincter Augmentation/LINX** – a laparoscopic procedure that involves placing a small ring of titanium-coated magnets around the esophagus at the connection point to the stomach to stop reflux, but still allow food/liquid to pass through when swallowing

GERD isn't fun for anyone. It can interfere with eating, sleeping and enjoying everyday life, but at the same time, it can be easily treated once properly diagnosed.

This isn't a condition to ignore. In addition to being an inconvenience and having some uncomfortable side effects, left untreated, GERD can damage the esophagus over time. On top of that, it can lead to more serious problems like esophagitis, Barrett's esophagus and esophageal cancer.

There are solutions available to help you feel better! For more information about GERD treatments or to schedule an appointment, please contact FVSS at 920-731-8131. Learn more at www.foxvalleysurgical.com.