Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) is a condition in which stomach acid reflux causes troublesome symptoms or complications. It is usually differentiated from heartburn as more severe and/or more frequent (>2 times per week).

**Symptoms of GERD include**
- Heartburn
- Non-heart related chest pain
- Acidic taste in the mouth
- Chronic cough
- Tooth decay

**Triggers of GERD include**
- Eating fatty, acidic, or spicy foods
- Drinking alcohol or caffeine
- Laying down right after eating
- Some medications

Avoiding the triggers listed above may be enough for some patients to decrease the severity or frequency of GERD. Other ways to prevent GERD include losing weight if overweight, sleeping on one’s left side, and elevating your head with extra pillows if symptoms are worst in the during the night.

To neutralize stomach acid during GERD symptoms, take antacids such as Tums®, Rolaids®, Mylanta®, or Maalox® which are all available in generic forms.

Proton pump inhibitors (PPI) and histamine 2 (H2) antagonists decrease the amount of acid produced in the stomach and are used to prevent symptoms of GERD. They should be taken once to twice daily 30 minutes before meals as directed by a pharmacist or a physician. Common proton pump inhibitors include Prilosec® (omeprazole), Prevacid® (lansoprazole), Protonix® (pantoprazole), and Nexium (esomeprazole)® and common H2-antagonists are Zantac® (ranitidine) and Pepcid® (famotidine).

Reducing the amount of acid in the stomach with the use of proton pump inhibitors and H2-antagonists can lead to decreased absorption of some medications, vitamins, and minerals. Calcium requires an acidic environment to be absorbed. Without proper amounts of calcium, patients can develop osteoporosis. This is of most concern in patients at high risk for osteoporosis such as post-menopausal women. One form of calcium, calcium citrate (Citracal®), can be absorbed regardless of the acid level in the stomach. If taking a calcium supplement while taking a PPI or an H2-antagonist, consider taking calcium citrate with vitamin D. It is important to treat GERD because when left untreated, the condition can cause ulcers or changes in the cells in the esophagus which can even lead to cancer.