Gastro-Esophageal Reflux (GER) in Children

Gastroesophageal reflux (GER) is a condition where the stomach contents and/or acids come up into the esophagus or even the mouth. There is a muscle at the end of the esophagus that opens and closes to let food into the stomach and keep it there. Sometimes, when this muscle opens, stomach contents can go backward up the esophagus. If it is a problem, your child can experience heartburn, chest pain, worsening asthma, weight loss, and chronic cough.

**How is it diagnosed?**

Many times, your health care provider makes the diagnosis based on history and physical examination. Other times, these tests can be used:

- **Upper GI series x-ray** – Your child drinks barium (a contrast medication that helps with x-rays) and the x-ray machine takes pictures as it goes into the stomach.
- **Endoscopy** – Your child is given a medicine that will help him or her sleep. Then the doctor will use a very tiny tube with a camera on the end to look directly at the esophagus and stomach.
- **Esophageal pH probe** – A small thin wire with an acid sensor is placed in your child’s nose and down into the esophagus. This measures the amount of acid that is brought back into the esophagus from the stomach.

**How is it treated?**

Usually, the doctor will give you suggestions for things to try at home. After that, he or she may prescribe a medication that will lower the amount of acid in the stomach. Children with severe GER may require surgery to fix the problem.

**What can be done at home?**

There are many things that can be done at home to lessen the GER.

- Have your child eat smaller meals more often.
- Have your child avoid eating 2-3 hours before bedtime or nap.
- Elevate the head of your child’s bed 30 degrees. You can place some object under the head of the bed to raise it up. This could be books, stone blocks, specially purchased blocks, or anything else to raise it about 4-6 inches.
- **Diet** – Avoid giving your child carbonated drinks (soda), chocolate, caffeine, and foods that are high in fat (french fries, pizza) or contain a lot of acid (citrus, pickles, tomato products) or spices.
- Avoid exposing your child to cigarette smoke.
- Help your child lose weight if overweight.
- Don’t allow your child to eat a big meal before exercising.
What are signs that the GER is not getting better?

- Vomiting, weight loss
- Frequent complaints of food or liquid coming into the throat or mouth
- Complaints of pain in chest or stomach
- Swallowing problems – pain, sensation that food “gets stuck”
- Breathing problems – wheezing, chronic cough or pneumonia, hoarseness, asthma

Call your child’s health care provider or the Children’s Mercy Hospital Information Line at (816) 234-3188 if:

- Your child continually vomits.
- Your child’s asthma is frequently in the yellow or red zone.
- Your child is complaining of chest pain.
- You have questions or concerns.