Gastroesophageal reflux (GER) is a condition where the stomach contents and/or acids come up into the throat (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, you can experience heartburn, chest pain, worsening asthma, weight loss, and chronic cough.

**How is it diagnosed?**

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

- **Upper GI series x-ray** – You drink barium (a contrast medicine that helps with the x-rays) and the x-ray machine takes pictures as it goes into the stomach.

- **Endoscopy** – You are given a medicine that will help you 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 the nose. 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. People 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.

- Eat smaller meals more often.

- Avoid eating 2-3 hours before bedtime or nap.

- Don’t eat a big meal right before exercising.

- Elevate the head of the 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 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.

- Do not smoke. Avoid exposure to cigarette smoke. Tell others not to smoke around you or in your house.

- Lose weight if you are overweight.
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 health care provider or the Children’s Mercy Hospital Information Line at (816) 234-3188 if:

- You continually vomit.
- Your asthma is frequently in the yellow or red zone.
- You are having chest pain.
- You have questions or concerns.