

GERD and the Elderly

Chief symptom is heartburn

by Jean Jeffers, Staff Writer

Everyone has experienced heartburn on occasion. Some 10 percent to 20 percent of adults, however, experience this condition at least weekly or more. While studies show there is generally less heartburn in older adults, there is quite a severity of complications among seniors, and that is alarming.

Heartburn is the chief symptom of gastro-esophageal reflux disease (GERD), a condition in which stomach fluids (with acid) splash back up into the esophagus after passing through the lower esophageal sphincter. GERD is potentially a serious condition. Ordinarily, food is taken in and masticated in the mouth. It passes through the esophagus and through the sphincter into the stomach, where it is mixed with acids. But sometimes the sphincter relaxes, is defective or only partially closes after the food passes through. Stomach acid juices then are more likely to flow back and damage the esophagus and cause symptoms such as heartburn. Especially in the elderly, the sphincter is sometimes slow to close, and this allows stomach contents, including acids, to splash back up into the esophagus, causing irritation.

Heartburn is characterized by pain in the chest below the sternum, or breast bone. This pain may radiate to the neck, throat and back. Other common GERD symptoms include acid regurgitation, belching and nausea. There may be a cough, voice, hoarseness, a sour or bitter taste in the mouth and worsening of symptoms after eating. There may be nocturnal distress as well. Also in the elderly, there are more common atypical symptoms, such as stimulation of angina (chest pain related to the heart), ear, nose and throat problems and dental involvement.

GERD diagnostic tests include a barium swallow and an upper GI. Complications vary from minor problems, such as laryngitis, to major problems such as recurrent pulmonary aspiration. Barrett's esophagus and esophageal cancer are two more severe complications of the disease. Barrett's esophagus is a condition in which the lining of the esophagus is replaced by tissue more common in the intestines. It is a pre-malignant disease highly associated with the development of adenocarcinoma of the esophagus.

The treatment goals for GERD include elimination of symptoms, managing or preventing complications and maintaining remission

should cancer develop. To help you deal with GERD, you might want to:

- Elevate the head of your bed.
- Avoid eating within three hours of bedtime.
- Avoid tobacco, alcohol, caffeine, fatty foods and peppermint.
- Avoid harmful medications.

Medications for treatment purposes include antacids and protein pump inhibitors such as Nexium (the purple pill) and omeprazole. Also used are Histamine 2-receptor antagonists, over-the-counter medications that effect good acid suppression and symptom relief. They are for mild cases of the disease. Motility agents may also be used, and there are some drugs used specifically in those with diabetes.

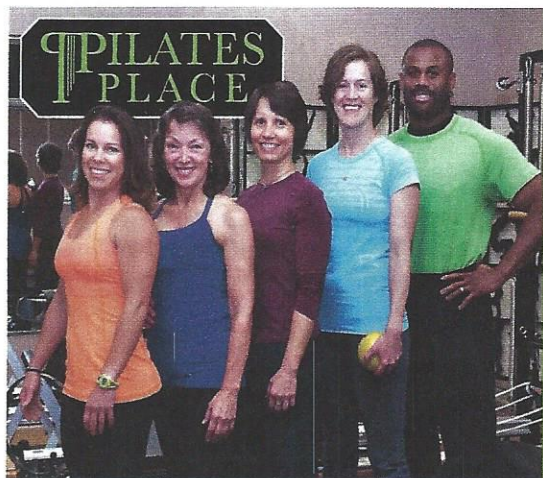
A number of abnormalities play a part in the development of GERD and are more often serious in the elderly. These include:

- a non-working lower esophageal sphincter;
- less saliva production; and

- delayed emptying of the stomach.

Relapses are common in elderly persons with GERD, especially those with complications. Although most people with GERD can be treated effectively by medical management, surgery may be warranted and is sometimes recommended in more serious cases of the disease.

Heartburn is the chief symptom of gastro-esophageal reflux disease (GERD).



Pilates is designed to strengthen the body's core muscles through low-impact fitness techniques.

All sessions taught by Stott Pilates trained health professionals.

859-266-3810
365 Duke Rd.
Lexington
studio@pilatesplaceky.com

follow us on:



SINCE 1973
ROBERTS HEALTH FOODS & SERVICES
"THE GOOD HEALTH PEOPLE"

HEART HEALTHY NUTRIENTS:

20% OFF

Omega 3 and CoQ 10

Not valid on sale items or with other discounts. Expires 2/28/15.

Keep your heart healthy this Valentine's Day!

Eastland Shopping Center

1020 Industry Rd. Ste 10 Lexington, KY 40505

859-253-0012 Mon 9-7, Tues-Sat 9-6 • robertshealthfoods.com

**ARE YOU DISABLED?
HAVE YOU APPLIED FOR SOCIAL SECURITY DISABILITY?
ARE YOU CAUGHT UP IN RED TAPE?**

An experienced Social Security Claims Advocate can help you:

- By assisting you in filing your initial application.
- Filling out and filing your appeals.
- Gather medical and other important information to submit to Social Security.
- Contact your doctors to obtain a report of your medical condition.
- By obtaining documents from your Social Security file and review them.
- By presenting opening and closing statements at your hearing that will state how you meet the Social Security listing of being disabled.

For a FREE CONSULTATION of your claim call Patsy R. Hughes, Disability Claims Advocate, 1-859-263-7780.



NO FEE IS PAID UNLESS YOU WIN

