

## **TOUGH FINANCIAL TIMES UPSETTING AMERICA'S STOMACH Are Doctors Providing a Cure or a Band-Aid?**

By Dr. Robyn Conte

Across the country clinics are seeing a rise in patients complaining of heartburn. The increased stress of tumbling financial markets, overindulgence in alcohol, fast food, chocolate and smoking is adding to the problem. More serious problems may be behind chronic heartburn, technically referred to as Gastro esophageal reflux disease (GERD). Rather than accepting the routine prescription of Prilosec, it's important for patients suffering from GERD to push their doctor for the cause behind their problems.

GERD is a chronic form of gastro esophageal reflux which occurs when the ring of muscle or lower esophageal sphincter (LES) does not close properly. The LES is designed to keep stomach acids from irritating and burning the esophagus. When patients experience an attack of GERD a sour taste, difficulty swallowing, dry coughing, or burning in the mid-chest is experienced. Some patients are unaware of symptoms until their sour breath becomes offensive to friends or family. Chronic reflux that occurs more than twice a week is considered GERD, and it can eventually lead to more serious health problems like esophageal cancer. GERD affects people of all ages.

Contributing factors for GERD include smoking, diabetes, diet, smoking, obesity and certain medications. Patients should actively seek out a physician who examines lifestyle, past medical history and current stress levels in addition to routine testing. Dr. Conte says "I see too many patients on fistfuls of medications who become frustrated with the side effects of those prescriptions. Once they are provided with healthy eating tools, stress reduction, and an exercise routine, we are often able to eliminate some, if not all, of their medications." In fact recent studies of GERD medications link them to osteoporosis. "Medications are supposed to provide relief, but are specifically not to cause additional harm," says Dr. Conte. Natural remedies along with lifestyle changes can provide real relief, not just a band-aid.

It's important to see your physician to determine if you do indeed have GERD or other gastrointestinal ailment. Patients with GERD find relief with encapsulated peppermint, slippery elm powder mixed into applesauce, or supplements that contain mucilaginous herbs that can help coat an irritated lining. Digestive enzymes can go a long way in assisting the body in breaking down food products, thereby improving transit time and discomfort. Identifying food allergies is critical in improvement. Gastrointestinal complaints respond wonderfully to natural treatments and relief can be permanent. Be sure to discuss your case with your doctor so that an individualized plan can be constructed.

Rockwood Natural Medicine Clinic (RNMC) is a naturopathic family practice facility. RNMC was founded in 1991 as a primary care/family practice clinic with a mission to provide safe, sensible and effective natural medicine for the entire family. Dr. Thomas Kruzel and Dr. Robyn Conte are dedicated to educating and training the next generation of healthcare providers. For more information about RNMC, please visit [www.rockwoodnaturalmedicine.com](http://www.rockwoodnaturalmedicine.com).

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