

GERD

More Than Just Indigestion



It's hard to miss the advertisements offering the latest remedies for heartburn. Long-time favorites like Tums®, Milk of Magnesia® and Maalox® now face stiff competition from newer, often longer-lasting, over-the-counter medications. But in the rush to find a quick fix, consumers may be unaware that heartburn is one of the most common symptoms of a potentially serious disease called Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease, or GERD. Left untreated, GERD can erode the lining of the esophagus and lead to more serious ailments.

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feeling that her throat was closing, as well as chest pain so intense it left her incapacitated. Things were no better for her mother, Josephine Diorio, a 67-year-old mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. In the late 1990s, she noticed that food seemed to be sticking in her throat during mealtime. She also began experiencing chest pain that forced her to lay in bed for hours at a time.

Few people know that better than Julie Sinatra of Wakefield and her mother, Josephine Diorio, of Peabody, who both suffer from a severe variant of GERD called DGERD, or duodenogastroesophageal reflux disease.

Julie Sinatra, a 36-year-old mother of two, started having frequent heartburn in the mid-1990s. Things got much worse two years ago, when her symptoms also began to include a

Common, and Not-So-Common, Symptoms of GERD

Typical symptoms:

- Frequent heartburn (at least once per week)
- An acid taste in the back of the throat
- Difficulty swallowing

Less common symptoms:

- Non-burning chest pain
- Asthma
- The feeling of having something stuck in your throat

Some sufferers of GERD have no symptoms whatsoever. Whether you have GERD symptoms or not, you should see your primary care physician if a member of your family suffers from GERD or esophageal cancer.

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First Diorio, then Sinatra turned to NSMC gastroenterologist Irving Ingraham, M.D., for relief. He spent nearly 45 minutes with each of them as he does with every new patient. Such a thorough exam is not only crucial for an accurate diagnosis, but goes a long way toward reassuring patients.

“Talking with Dr. Ingraham really made me feel that he understood what I was going through,” said Diorio.

Dr. Ingraham prescribed medications—the most common way to treat GERD—which have been effective in relieving the symptoms. “Ten years ago, these patients would be looking at surgery to control symptoms,” said Dr. Ingraham. “Today, medications have advanced for treating severe reflux to the point where surgery is seldom necessary.”

As for the patients, they consider the medications to be nothing short of a miracle. “The pain is nothing like it used to be,” said Sinatra. “I’m feeling 100 percent better.”

NSMC Salem Hospital’s endoscopy suite offers a wide range of tests for diagnosing GERD. Endoscopy—which involves sending a tiny probe down the patient’s esophagus that takes pictures



along the way and collects tissue for biopsy—is one of the most common tests. Dr. Ingraham used the test to diagnose Sinatra’s and Diorio’s DGERD. Other tests available include barium swallow X-rays, which show anomalies in the esophageal area and manometry, which measures pressure in the esophagus.

As for Dr. Ingraham, he’s grateful for NSMC’s endoscopy suite as well as the myriad of new prescription drugs available today. “Today, we have so much more to offer.”

SAVE THE DATE! REGISTER NOW!



Take the Cancer Fight to the Streets!

You can make the difference in the fight against cancer. Join us on **Sunday, June 24, 2007** for the 17th annual NSMC Cancer WALK—the largest one-day fundraising event on the North Shore. Over the past 16 years, the WALK has contributed more than \$12 million to the NSMC Cancer Center, ensuring that the most sophisticated oncology services are available in our area.

Please participate in the 2007 NSMC Cancer WALK either by walking and raising money, sponsoring a walker, placing a Tribute ad or becoming a corporate sponsor. Together we can make a difference. Visit nsmccancerwalk.org or call 866-296-6900 for more information.



nsmccancerwalk.org