Gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD)

What is GORD?

Gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD) is a common condition where stomach acid frequently flows back into the oesophagus (the tube that connects your mouth to your stomach). This backflow, or reflux, can cause irritation, discomfort, and damage to the lining of the oesophagus if left untreated.

Reflux is normal to some extent, but when it happens often or causes troublesome symptoms, it is classed as GORD. Although GORD can affect people of all ages, it is more common in adults and can significantly impact your quality of life.

What are the symptoms of GORD?

The symptoms of GORD can vary, but common signs include:

- **Heartburn**: A burning sensation in the chest, often after eating or when lying down.
- **Regurgitation**: A sour or bitter taste caused by stomach acid or food coming back up into your throat or mouth.
- **Difficulty swallowing (dysphagia)**: A feeling of food getting stuck in your throat.
- **Chest pain**: Sometimes mistaken for heart-related pain, especially after eating.
- **Chronic cough or hoarseness**: Often worse at night due to acid irritating the throat.
- **Other symptoms**: Nausea, bloating, or bad breath.

What causes GORD?

GORD occurs when the lower oesophageal sphincter (a muscle at the bottom of the oesophagus) becomes weak or relaxes inappropriately, allowing stomach acid to escape into the oesophagus.

Several factors can contribute to GORD, including:

- Being overweight or obese.
- Eating large meals or lying down soon after eating.
- Consuming trigger foods, such as spicy, fatty, or acidic foods, as well as caffeine or alcohol.
- Smoking, which weakens the lower oesophageal sphincter.
- Pregnancy, which increases pressure on the stomach.
- Certain medications, such as anti-inflammatories or muscle relaxants.

How is GORD diagnosed?

If you experience frequent or severe symptoms, your GP may refer you to a specialist for further investigation. At the Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic, we use advanced diagnostic tools to assess GORD.

These may include:

- **Upper GI endoscopy**: A thin, flexible tube with a camera is passed into your oesophagus to check for inflammation, damage, or other issues. This is a quick and minimally invasive procedure.
- **Oesophageal pH monitoring**: A small device is used to measure acid levels in your oesophagus over 24 hours.
- **Oesophageal manometry**: A test to measure the strength and coordination of the muscles in your oesophagus.

How is GORD treated?

GORD can often be managed effectively with lifestyle changes, medications, or in some cases, surgery.

Lifestyle changes are the first step in managing GORD. These include:

- Eating smaller, more frequent meals.
- Avoiding trigger foods and drinks.
- Waiting at least three hours after eating before lying down.
- Raising the head of your bed to prevent reflux during the night.
- Losing weight if you are overweight.
- Quitting smoking and reducing alcohol intake.

Medication may be prescribed to reduce acid production or neutralise stomach acid. These include:

- Antacids: Provide quick relief by neutralising stomach acid.
- Proton pump inhibitors (PPIs): Reduce the amount of acid your stomach produces and help heal the oesophagus.
- H2-receptor antagonists: Reduce acid production but may not be as effective as PPIs.

Surgical options such as fundoplication may be considered if lifestyle changes and medications do not provide sufficient relief. This procedure involves tightening the lower oesophageal sphincter to prevent acid reflux.

When should you seek help?

While occasional symptoms can be normal, you should seek medical advice if you experience any of the following:

- Symptoms that persist despite lifestyle changes and over-the-counter medications.
- Difficulty swallowing or unexplained weight loss.
- Vomiting blood or noticing blood in your stools, as these could indicate complications such as ulcers or severe inflammation.

Why choose Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic?

At the Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic, we specialise in diagnosing and treating GORD with expert care and state-of-the-art technology. Our experienced gastroenterologists provide personalised treatment plans to help you manage your symptoms effectively. We are committed to delivering high-quality, patient-focused care to improve your quality of life.

Contact us

If you think you may have GORD or need support managing your symptoms, contact the Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic today to book a consultation. We are here to help you take control of your health and feel better.