

Surgical option for acid reflux

by Laurie Cunningham

That burning, churning, too-full feeling after a big meal is an unwelcome but not unexpected byproduct of holiday feasts and spicy food. Who wouldn't have heartburn after that kind of overindulgence?

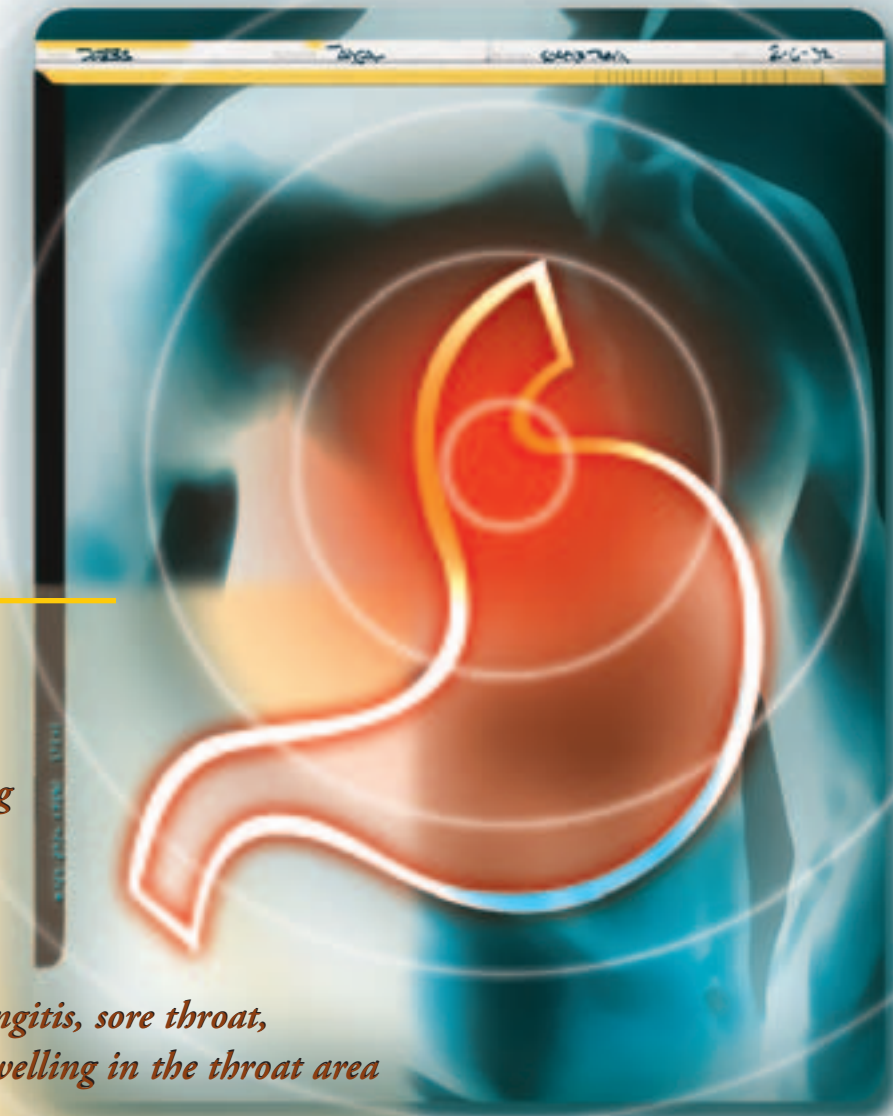
More than 44 percent of adults have [heartburn](#) at least once a month, and up to 80 percent of women have heartburn nearly every day during pregnancy. But as many as 14 percent of adults suffer almost daily from [gastroesophageal reflux disease](#) or [GERD](#).

GERD is the abnormal backflow of stomach acid and juices into the tube (esophagus) that leads from the throat to the stomach. This backflow occurs when the valve between the lower end of the esophagus and the stomach does not close tightly enough. Symptoms of GERD include:

- ✓ *heartburn*
- ✓ *a sour or bitter taste in the mouth*
- ✓ *difficulty swallowing or painful swallowing*
- ✓ *chest pain*
- ✓ *nausea*
- ✓ *ear, nose and throat problems such as laryngitis, sore throat, frequent throat clearing or a sensation of swelling in the throat area*
- ✓ *respiratory symptoms and problems such as coughing, wheezing or frequent pneumonia.*

Treatment of GERD usually begins with making lifestyle changes such as avoiding certain foods and not eating right before bedtime. Nonprescription antacids may also relieve symptoms. Severe GERD usually requires stronger prescription medication combined with lifestyle changes. People who don't get better with drug treatment, don't want to take medications for the rest of their lives and have severe complications or symptoms of GERD may opt for surgery.

Reflux is a "mechanical" problem, explains Dr. Chapman Olive, Ferrell-Duncan surgeon. Surgical treatment for GERD, or Nissen laparoscopic fundoplication, involves constructing a new "valve" between the esophagus and the stomach by wrapping the upper



portion of the stomach around the lowest point of the esophagus. Five incisions, or port sites, are made in order to perform the procedure.

"It's pretty much instant relief from heartburn," says Dr. Olive.

Most people leave the hospital within two days of having the surgery and return to normal activity within six to eight weeks, he says.

Laurie Cunningham is the director of Public Relations for CoxHealth.

Dr. Chapman Olive will present an overview of GERD and treatments at 7 p.m. Tues., Jan. 7 in Foster Auditorium at Cox South. Call 269-INFO.