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Gastro-oesophageal reflux disease: an update

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Gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD) is a common condition with health impacts ranging from the trivial to the very serious. Symptoms of GORD have a high prevalence in the general population, and it is a diagnosis made frequently in primary care, although discussions continue about the adequacy of a making a diagnosis based on symptoms alone, and the place of investigations in making it definitively. The incidence of GORD is increasing in many countries, related to increasing rates of obesity and changes in aspects of diet and "lifestyle", and it is well-recognised as a risk factor for oesophageal cancer. Traditional models of causality and treatment, involving oesophageal acid exposure and acid suppression by drugs such as proton pump inhibitors, is now complemented by a growing awareness of other factors which need to be considered. The importance of the functional anatomy of the gastro-oesophageal junction and the concept of the "acid pouch" is now recognised, along with non-acid reflux and the irritant effect of agents such as pepsin and bile acids. Together with psychological factors, these may be of aetiological importance in patients who do not respond well to conventional therapy. The role of surgery in the management of GORD has always been controversial, although greater clarity about its place in long-term treatment is emerging. Finally, discussions continue about the appropriateness of screening for oesophageal cancer through population approaches or by case-funding in patients with long-standing GORD

