



Helping Heartburn

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More than 60 million Americans have acid reflux. It's a common condition that can be more than just uncomfortable. It can also lead to cancer.

Darlene VanHoose said she loves her pizza, but it doesn't love her.

"I would have coughing spasms because of the acid coming up into my throat," she said. Darlene's acid reflux was more than just a little heartburn. And like many other people, it was misdiagnosed time and time again. Until now, there was no good way to detect it.

Through the new Restech device, doctors can detect acid reflux much more easily. A thin tube is connected to a transmitter. A bulb is a pH meter. It's inserted into the nose, resting in the back of the throat. The pH meter on the end of the tube picks up any signs of acid. It's worn for 24 hours. "This plots all the acid data on a graph and we know exactly when they were eating, when they were upright, when they were sleeping," said Dr. Ronald Simon, allergist, Scripps Clinic, San Diego, CA.

Many times, acid reflux is misdiagnosed as allergies. That's why this device will help take the guessing game out of a diagnosis.

Sheldon Rosenberg is back to enjoying life, thanks to another device that helped treat a condition called Barrett's esophagus.

"I thought I was having a heart attack one night. I had a pain in my chest," said Rosenberg. Barrett's happens when stomach acid builds up in the esophagus and causes the lining to change. If left untreated, it can lead to cancer.

"We have been looking for a means to treat these patients in a way that's less invasive and effective," said Dr. Ronen Arai, gastroenterologist, Coral Springs Medical Center, Florida. And the answer may be the halo procedure. The device literally heats away the problem in about 15 minutes with no incision. Doctors insert a tube down the patient's throat and inflate a balloon. Energy travels through it and burns away the top layer of the esophagus. Healthy tissue eventually grows back. It gets rid of Barrett's in up to 90 percent of cases.

Rush University Medical Center is now offering the procedure. Interventional gastroenterologist Sri Komanduri says the success rate is impressive.

"Right now, it is not something I would recommend for every person with Barrett's esophagus. I think what it allows us to do is to have an option for the patients who feel this is going to affect the quality of their life, and they may want it done earlier than later," said Komanduri.

"Oh, it was a simple procedure. It was easy - one, two, three, and I'm living my life, and everything is normal," said Rosenberg.