



ADVANCING HEALTH

New treatment for reflux disease provides patients freedom from medication

A new treatment available at Baptist Hospital in Southeast Texas provides sufferers of gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) relief from uncomfortable, and often painful, symptoms, while also allowing them to eat foods they were once afraid to eat and to sleep more soundly.

GERD is a condition in which the contents of the stomach flow into the esophagus, causing symptoms such as heartburn, chest pain, difficulty swallowing, dry cough and/or sore throat.

The LINX Reflux Management System is a flexible ring of small magnets about the size of a quarter that, during laparoscopic surgery, is placed around the esophagus just above the stomach to help prevent reflux. The beads separate to allow food to pass into the stomach when a person swallows. The magnet then draws the titanium beads back together to keep acid from going up into the esophagus.

Dr. Alex Ordonez, a surgeon with the Diagnostic Group in Beaumont, says that the LINX is a revolutionary treatment for GERD exhibiting outstanding outcomes and providing patients freedom from

over-the-counter drugs that don't always alleviate their symptoms.

"Who doesn't know somebody with acid reflux?" asked Ordonez. "There are so many people with GERD, and most of them are taking antacids to treat it."

In fact, statistics available through the National Institutes of Health indicate that approximately one in five people have GERD. That's about 20% of the population. Approximately 20 million people have pursued medical management to treat their GERD symptoms. About 40% of them continue to experience symptoms in spite of the medications.

"A lot of people who take medications for GERD will tell you that they have to have some sort of antacid because otherwise they have heartburn," Ordonez explained. "They could be treating it that way for 30, 40 years."

Ordonez encountered one patient who told him she had been taking antacids since 1989.

"She knew the date," he recalled. "Those medications are supposed to be taken for six weeks, and you see people

taking those medications for years, even decades. She told me, 'Every time I see my gastro (gastrointestinal/GI doctor), he tells me to leave it alone; it's a small hernia.' She said, 'When I bend, I bring up whatever I've eaten. Sitting up, propping my head up, doesn't work for me.' She somehow found out about LINX and what it does, and she came here.

"Those are the patients that should be given options, and one of those options is surgery."

Ordonez explains that, from his experience, GI doctors may not consider surgery as an option for clients simply because they do not perform the procedures and it may not always occur to them.

"A lot of GI doctors will tell the patients to take antacids or sleep with their head propped up, or something like that," he described.

The traditional surgical option, known as the Nissen fundoplication, that has been available for decades is not as simple as the LINX procedure, not as effective and has a longer estimated recovery period. The procedure is undergone to reinforce the lower esophageal sphincter and was first performed by Dr. Rudolph Nissen in 1955. During the surgery, the surgeon wraps the top of the stomach around the lower esophagus, reinforcing the lower esophageal sphincter and making it less likely that acid will back up in the esophagus. Doctors have been looking for "a better solution" to the Nissen fundoplication for many years, says Ordonez. The procedure is safe, he asserts, but actually alters the patient's basic anatomy.

"The problem with that operation is that it changes the anatomy of your stomach," he described. "Your stomach (internally) is not going to look the same as before."

Another issue with the traditional surgical option is that symptoms often re-emerge in 5 to 10 years, Ordonez explains. Not so with LINX, he says.

"It is a minimally invasive surgery, meaning you don't cut people open. You just make four small incisions. It takes about an hour. You send them home the same day or the following day," he described. "The moment they wake up, they have no reflux. They don't need medications for reflux. There is a 95% chance of that, because nothing is perfect. That's a 95% chance that the acid reflux is going to go away."

Information from LINX indicates that, at 5 years after LINX surgery, 85% of patients remained free from dependence on



Dr. Alex Ordonez explains the LINX procedure.

daily GERD medication, severe regurgitation was eliminated in 99% of patients, bothersome heartburn was eliminated in 88% of patients and patients reported a significant overall improvement in their quality of life.

One young woman who had been living with GERD for years and had the LINX surgery performed by Ordonez thanked him and his staff for “giving her back her life,” he shared. She said she had not realized how many little things her GERD affected in her daily choices until she was free from the symptoms. She could then eat foods she had not felt comfortable consuming prior to the LINX procedure and could lie back in bed to sleep rather than propping her head up to prevent acid reflux, among other benefits she now enjoys.

“In the last 10-15 years, people have been trying to come up with a new technique, a surgery less invasive in a way, and to try to find an alternative” to the Nissen fundoplication, said Ordonez. “None of the things that have been tried, and not the traditional surgery, have worked as

well as these magnets, I believe.”

The LINX surgery is an excellent option for many who suffer GERD, says Ordonez, but it’s not for everyone. The doctor decides which surgery, if any, is the best fit on an individual basis.

Candidates for LINX should have a strong esophagus with no difficulty swallowing. All patients must undergo pre-surgical testing to determine their candidacy. Three diagnostic tests are used to determine if patients may be candidates for LINX: Endoscopy, pH and Manometry, the last of which measures esophageal function. The LINX ring comes in different sizes to best fit a patient’s esophagus. The ring of magnets also allows those receiving the treatment the ability to belch and vomit, as needed.

Patients must be 21 years of age and older and healthy enough for surgery to qualify. Patients who have the LINX treatment are encouraged to start eating right away – no liquid diet like with the traditional surgery.

Over-the-counter medications just do not treat the underlying problem, Ordonez explains. They neutralize the stomach acid but the acid still comes up into the esophagus. The only way to stop the reflux from occurring altogether is by surgical management, he says, and people with longstanding symptoms should consider asking their GI doctors for a surgical referral.

The Diagnostic Group is located at 3406 College St. in Beaumont and may be reached by phone at (409) 813-1677. More information is available on the Diagnostic Group website at www.dgihs.com.

– Sharon Brooks

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