

# New drug to help patients stomach acid reflux

*Number of GERD patients doubled in past 20 years: Doctor*

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**SINGAPORE** – At 80, housewife Lim Lean Hoe has spent more than a third of her life suffering from stomach pain, nausea, heartburn and constant burping day and night — classic symptoms of gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD).

Commonly known as acid reflux, GERD occurs when the stomach's contents and stomach acid back up into the oesophagus. This irritates the oesophagus' lining, causing pain or a burning sensation in the chest.

The number of GERD patients

has doubled in the past 20 years, said Dr Jarrod Lee, a gastroenterologist from Mount Elizabeth Novena Specialist Centre. It now affects one in 10 people in Singapore.

Dr Lee said GERD patients are likely to be overweight and middle-aged. They may be smokers and may consume a lot of alcohol or coffee, take large meals and eat before bedtime.

A new Gastroenterological Society of Singapore study on 202 GERD patients from Changi General Hospital showed that more than 40 per cent of the patients experience sleep disruptions and have dietary restrictions. Almost half of them have nighttime symptoms, which affect their day activities.

The survey also found that almost 60 per cent of patients find current medication restrictive and unable to help in reducing pain and discomfort.

Known as proton pump inhibitors (PPI), GERD medication works well only when it is taken strictly before meals. Most PPIs also tend to wear off after half a day and patients may require twice-daily medication, said Dr Ang Tiing Leong, chief and senior consultant at the department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology at Changi General Hospital (CGH), who was involved in the GERD survey.

A new generation of PPI drug, dexlansoprazole, is now available for patients like Madam Lee, who finds it hard to follow a twice-daily, before-meals routine. "When taken once daily, it is comparable to the effect of twice-daily treatment. Patients do not need to take it according to their meal timings," said Dr Ang.



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