Gastroesophageal Reflux: Information for Parents

You may have been told that your baby has reflux, which is short for *gastroesophageal reflux* (GER). Reflux hap- pens when food from the stomach moves back into the esophagus or mouth. This can happen in healthy babies and adults. A baby with “normal” reflux may spit up often but does not have any other problems. This usually goes away before your baby is 1 year of age.



A more serious form of reflux, called *gastroesophageal reflux disease* (GERD), can cause problems, especially for babies in the neonatal intensive care unit. This kind

of reflux is defined by stronger vomiting and other symptoms. Your baby may have trouble gaining weight or may lose weight. He or she may cry a lot or act like he or she has trouble swallowing. Your baby may have blood-tinged vomit and problems with breathing and may need some tests to be sure that there is nothing else causing the vomiting. To help your baby with reflux, your baby’s provider may try positioning your baby a certain way after feedings, giving smaller feedings more often, or increasing the time of a feeding. If these things do not work, medicine may be used. If you have any questions, ask your baby’s provider about what you can do to help your baby have less reflux or about the side effects and possible risks of medications being given to your baby.

Surgery is only considered when medicine does not help. Surgery will be discussed if your baby cannot gain enough weight or if the vomiting causes a lot of problems with breathing (sometimes this is due to aspiration).

When you take your baby to see your pediatric provider after you have gone home, let him or her know how much and how often your baby is spitting up or vomiting. If your baby is going home on medication, please make sure to give the right amount at the right times. It is import- ant not to change your baby’s diet or medicines without talking to your pediatric provider. Talk about how well you think the feedings are going so that the medicines can be changed or stopped as needed.