

Robotic-assisted surgery for GERD — Nissen Fundoplication — being performed at Bayfront Health Port Charlotte

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BAYFRONT HEALTH PORT
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According to the American Gastroenterological Association, more than 60 million Americans are estimated to experience heartburn at least once a month and a staggering 15 million suffer daily. Heartburn is the most common symptom of GERD, or gastroesophageal reflux disease. For some, the occasional heartburn can be managed, but when your symptoms are frequent and bad enough to impact your sense of well-being, you may need to try something else.

“Since the age of 40, I tried every over-the-counter and prescription medication out there,” says Punta Gorda resident Virginia, who goes by Ginger. “They worked, but didn’t handle the problem. I wanted something to take care of it. I wanted a long-term eraser.”

Every person may not feel GERD in the same way. For Ginger, she experienced pain daily behind the chest that would move up toward her neck, pain that became worse when she bent over or was lying down. As a result, she regularly had a sore throat and pain when swallowing. “If I forgot to take my meds in the morning, by noon I couldn’t eat or drink anything. The heartburn would become just that bad.”

When Ginger went to meet with general surgeon Maria Castilla, M.D., for

IF YOU GO

Thursday, May 10, 8:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. — Brew with a View: Coffee Talk with Dr. Castilla. Speaker: Maria Castilla, M.D., General Surgeon. Bayfront Health Punta Gorda Medical Office Plaza, 4th Floor Conf. Room, 713 E. Marion Ave., Punta Gorda. Bring your questions and join Dr. Castilla for an open discussion on the signs, symptoms and management of a variety of ailments and diseases. She will touch on a selection of topics including an overview of heartburn and GERD. Free. Register at www.BayfrontHealthEvents.com.

her annual colonoscopy, Ginger mentioned the severity of her GERD symptoms and how it was affecting her life. Dr. Castilla opted to run a few tests before discussing next steps.

“I first wanted to refer Ginger to a gastroenterologist to rule out the possibility of any other health issues,” said Castilla. “There are certain symptoms that mimic GERD symptoms, but may point to complications or life-threatening problems. With Ginger, testing revealed that her esophageal sphincter, a band of muscles at the bottom of her esophagus, wasn’t working properly.

When you swallow, the sphincter relaxes so food can pass through to the stomach. When not in use, the sphincter contracts to keep food and acid from flowing back up. Ginger’s wasn’t contracting so anything she ate and drank would ultimately flow

back up causing severe heartburn and related symptoms.”

Since Ginger’s GERD symptoms were so severe and could not be eased with medicine or lifestyle change, Dr. Castilla recommended a nissen fundoplication using robotic-assisted techniques. The surgery was performed at Bayfront Health Port Charlotte in November of 2017.

During this procedure, Dr. Castilla wrapped the upper curve of Ginger’s stomach, referred to as the fundus, around her esophagus and stitched it into place. This would ultimately aide in strengthening the valve between her esophagus and stomach to prevent acid and food from rising into her esophagus as easily.

Today, Ginger says her body is still adapting to the change. “My gastro system works differently now. I think I honestly had GERD symptoms all my life. Now my body is adjusting. There are still certain foods I cannot eat, like bread in large quantities. But that’s a good thing! It has taught me how not to overeat. Overall, it’s been positive. I only wish I had the procedure done sooner. I recommend to anyone that wants to maintain their life without taking medications the rest of their life.”

If your GERD symptoms are severe and interfering with your lifestyle, your physician may suggest surgery. Speak to your doctor to see if nissen surgery may be right for you. To find a physician, visit www.BayfrontCharlotte.com/find-a-doc.