



## 'An ounce of prevention' - Cheryl's story

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Cheryl Harper, 61, of Fallbrook, is one who definitely believes in the adage "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Unfortunately she had to find it out the hard way, but now she stresses the fact that many of her serious and almost fatal health situations could have been avoided if she had only sought early treatment.

Her health problems began in 1983 after she had a gastric stapling procedure. "It wasn't done as much then as it is now," she said, "and I didn't have any support group afterward." After the stapling, Cheryl began to experience an acid reflux condition, which worsened over time. "It came to the point that I was vomiting all the time when I ate, but I still let it go twelve years before I went to the doctor. It was twelve years that my esophagus was subject to acid - I should have taken care of it."

One of the reasons that Cheryl avoided the doctor is because she believed that her symptoms would "go away on their own." "I wasn't afraid to go to the doctor," she mentioned. However, as her acid condition became worse, she began to vomit after eating. Then, in the evenings she was beset with coughing jags so violent that she could hardly catch her breath. Finally she tired of the coughing and sought help.

She was hospitalized for three weeks after her esophageal repair. While in the hospital she dealt with complications such as pneumonia and a blood clot. "I almost died twice," said Cheryl. "It was a big ordeal. Every time they conquered one problem, another sprang up. It took me a full year to get back to normal. I don't think any of this would have happened if I had gone to the doctor [at symptom onset]. I learned that things don't always go away on their own."

After Cheryl's esophagus repair surgery doctors discovered, through an endoscopy exam, that she had a pre-cancerous condition called Barrett's Esophagus. Because her mother had died of esophageal cancer, this greatly disturbed Cheryl.

Cheryl again sought treatment, in this case, a procedure called "ablation," which destroys the pre-cancerous cells. Doctors now monitor her condition through yearly endoscopy exams.

"Everything I have gone through would not have happened if I had gone to the doctor," Cheryl said. "I hope to get this across to people - 'Don't let things go.'"