Nearly 10 percent of adults have Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD) and experience symptoms such as heartburn (acid reflux) on a daily or weekly basis. The typical management for this condition is through prescription or nonprescription forms of a proton pump inhibitor to reduce the production of stomach acid. Stomach acid production is essential for proper digestion and absorption of key nutrients such as iron, magnesium, and calcium. The use of proton pump inhibitors for long periods of time can be detrimental to the natural process for digestion. Though these medications can provide safe, short-term symptom relief, long-term use can potentially lead to serious health conditions such as anemia and osteoporosis. A more direct and effective way to reduce symptoms is to make small lifestyle changes that will provide sustainable relief to those with GERD.

What can you, the employer, do to reduce the misuse of proton pump inhibitors?

- Educate employees on the benefits of lifestyle changes to reduce symptoms, such as:
  - Eat frequent but small meals—smaller portions are more likely to stay in the stomach rather than being pushed into the esophagus.
  - Avoid lying down within three hours of eating.
  - Eat slowly—allow the stomach to digest and empty what is already there.
  - Move it—physical activity can aid in digestion and help the stomach empty efficiently.
  - Eliminate trigger foods such as alcohol, fatty foods, carbonated beverages, and chocolate.
  - Remove coverage for brand-name proton pump inhibitors. There are a variety of over-the-counter or generic options available that are proven to be effective in treatment.
  - If serious conditions exist that do not respond to generic options, such as stomach ulcers, require prior authorization for stronger medication.
  - Educate members on the importance of using the lowest possible effective dose of the medication for the shortest duration as possible.