



## **Know the Facts: You can have GERD and asthma at the same time**

### **Can people have GERD and asthma at the same time? Yes!**

Asthma and GERD (gastroesophageal reflux disease) very often occur together. Almost 4 out of every 5 people with asthma suffer from some degree of GERD. The problem is that GERD may worsen asthma symptoms. Some asthma medications may worsen GERD symptoms.

### **Why does this happen?**

Usually stomach acid is kept in the stomach by a valve at the bottom of the esophagus. Sometimes this valve doesn't work and the acid from the stomach travels all the way up the esophagus. One theory is that the stomach acid is inhaled into the lungs, which can cause spasms in the airways of the lungs. This can produce a cough and asthma-like symptoms.

### **Your health care provider may suspect GERD is causing your asthma if:**

- Your asthma began when you were an adult.
- Your asthma symptoms get worse after a meal, after exercise, at night or after lying down.
- Your asthma doesn't get better with standard asthma treatments.

To help healthcare providers with their diagnosis, they might prescribe a traditional medicine called a **bronchodilator** or drugs to suppress the amount of acid you are producing.

### **What can you do?**

If you have both asthma and GERD, work with your healthcare provider to treat your asthma. Once your asthma is under control, the next step will be to treat the symptoms of GERD.

### **To control the symptoms of GERD:**

1. Raise the head of your bed by 6 inches to help keep the acid in your stomach. Put bricks, blocks or anything that is sturdy under the legs at the head of your bed. Or, use a wedge-shaped pillow to elevate your head.
2. Sleep on your left side. This position helps you digest food and with the removal of stomach acid.
3. Eat meals at least 3-4 hours before lying down, avoid bedtime snacks and eat smaller meals.
4. Maintain a healthy weight. Extra pounds create pressure on your stomach.
5. Limit eating fatty foods, chocolate, peppermint, coffee, tea, colas and alcohol. These foods allow acid to flow into your esophagus.
6. Limit eating tomatoes and citrus fruits or juices. These foods create additional acid that can irritate the esophagus.
7. Quit smoking. It affects the lower esophagus.
8. Wear loose belts and clothing.

*Although there are many over-the-counter antacids that can often relieve GERD symptoms, always check with your healthcare provider before taking these to make sure they won't cause your asthma symptoms to worsen.*



**Treating asthma and GERD together is complicated. Be sure to consult your healthcare professional and learn to identify your symptoms. Being informed about this condition may help you improve your health.**

Sources:

Web MD: *Heartburn and Asthma*, December 25, 2006.

Leggett, J.L., Johnston, B.T., Mills, M., Gamble, J. & Heaney, L.G. *Prevalence of gastroesophageal reflux in difficult asthma: relationship to asthma outcome. CHEST, April 2005).*

About: *Heartburn/GERD* at <http://heartburn.about.com/od/gerdacidrefluxdisease/a/gerdasthma.htm>

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