



Editorial Note

Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) in humans

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EDITORIAL

Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD) is a digestive disorder that occurs when acidic stomach juices, or food and fluids back up from the stomach into the esophagus. GERD affects people of all ages-from infants to older adults.

People with asthma are at higher risk of developing GERD. Asthma flare-ups can cause the lower esophageal sphincter to relax, allowing stomach contents to flow back, or reflux, into the esophagus. Some asthma medications (especially theophylline) may worsen reflux symptoms.

Acid reflux can make asthma symptoms worse by irritating the airways and lungs. This, in turn, can lead to progressively more serious asthma. Also, this irritation can trigger allergic reactions and make the airways more sensitive to environmental conditions such as smoke or cold air.

SYMPTOMS

Everyone has experienced gastroesophageal reflux. It happens when you burp, have an acid taste in your mouth or have heartburn. However, if these symptoms interfere with your daily life it is time to see your physician.

- Acid regurgitation
- Difficulty or pain when swallowing
- Sudden excess of saliva
- Chronic sore throat
- Laryngitis or hoarseness
- Inflammation of the gums
- Cavities
- Bad breath
- A recurrent or chronic cough
- Chest pain

RISK FACTORS

Conditions that can increase your risk of GERD include:

- Obesity
- Bulging of the top of the stomach up into the diaphragm (hiatal hernia)
- Pregnancy
- Connective tissue disorders, such as scleroderma
- Delayed stomach emptying

COMPLICATIONS

Narrowing of the esophagus (esophageal stricture). Damage to the lower esophagus from stomach acid causes scar tissue to form. The scar tissue narrows the food pathway, leading to problems with swallowing.

An open sore in the esophagus (esophageal ulcer). Stomach acid can wear away tissue in the esophagus, causing an open sore to form. An esophageal ulcer can bleed, cause pain and make swallowing difficult.

Precancerous changes to the esophagus (Barrett's esophagus). Damage from acid can cause changes in the tissue lining the lower esophagus. These changes are associated with an increased risk of esophageal cancer.