

## ACID REFLUX: MORE THAN JUST HEARTBURN

Acid reflux is a common problem but what you may not know is that it has many other symptoms in addition to heartburn. There are two types of acid reflux – gastroesophageal reflux (GERD) and laryngopharyngeal reflux (LPR). GERD presents with the typical symptoms of heartburn but can also cause chest pain or tightness and cough. LPR can cause hoarseness, throat clearing, difficulty swallowing, sore throat, a sensation of a lump in the throat and even excessive mucus in the throat and postnasal drip as a result of irritation of tissue by the acid coming up into the throat. Discolored mucus in the throat is not necessarily a sign of sinus infection. Less than 40% of patients with LPR have heartburn. Because acid in the throat causes swelling of the tissues responsible for snoring and sleep apnea, these disorders can be made worse by acid reflux.

A variety of tests may be ordered to diagnose reflux, including laryngoscopy, ambulatory pH monitoring, endoscopy, and upper GI. The diagnosis may also be made based on the patient having typical symptoms.

### TREATMENT

In general, treatment of LPR can be more challenging than for GERD. Lifestyle changes are an important component of the treatment, but most patients also require a type of acid lowering medicine called a proton pump inhibitor (PPI). Patients with severe LPR may take 2-3 months to notice significant improvement. Some patients may even require dosing twice a day rather than the standard once daily regimen. PPIs should be taken 30 to 60 minutes before a meal. Your stomach produces acid when you eat so taking your PPI before eating can prevent the extra acid from being produced. Taking the PPI on an empty stomach also helps it work better. You must take your medication every day. For people with mild symptoms, the PPI may begin to work on the first day or up to four days. Healing of damage to your esophagus or upper airway may take months.

#### Lifestyle Treatment

- **Weight loss is the single most effective lifestyle treatment for acid reflux.**
- Do not eat or drink within 3 or 4 hours of bedtime.
- Wait at least 2 hours after eating to lie down.
- Sleep with the head of the bed elevated 8 inches. Normal pillows do not provide adequate elevation to prevent reflux.
- Eat a well-balanced diet with smaller portions.
- Alcohol, tobacco, caffeine, and chocolate are irritants and should be avoided.
- Certain foods, such as orange and other citrus juice, peppermint, and tomatoes may aggravate symptoms.
- Reduce stress.