

**What is GERD?**

- ✓ Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) is a condition in which stomach contents repeatedly flow back up the esophagus, which connects the stomach to the mouth. This backwash is called reflux.
- ✓ If stomach contents reach the back of the throat, they can flow into the lungs. Cough also occurs from stimulation of the nerves in the esophagus, even when stomach contents do not come all the way up.
- ✓ Symptoms of GERD include:
  - Cough. Individuals with lung disease may think cough is due to lung disease, when it is actually caused by GERD.
  - Hoarse or raspy voice due to inflammation of the vocal cords.
  - Heartburn, which usually happens after eating and might be worse when lying down. Note that half of all individuals with GERD do not have heartburn.
  - Pain in the chest or upper belly.
  - Trouble swallowing, backwash of sour liquid or food, or a sensation of a lump in the throat.
  - Burping.

**Who is Most Likely to Have GERD?**

- ✓ GERD occurs more frequently among individuals with:
  - Lung disease, including the lung diseases that are common among Alphas:
    - Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
    - Emphysema and chronic bronchitis
    - Asthma
  - Other common health conditions, including obesity, sleep apnea, and hiatal hernia (a very common condition in which the stomach bulges into the chest)
  - A pattern of eating large meals and meals in the 2 to 3 hours before going to bed
  - A diet that includes alcohol, caffeine, chocolate, citrus, or peppermint; however, trigger foods differ from person to person
  - Use of cigarettes and other tobacco products

**What Does GERD Have to do With My Lungs?**

- ✓ Individuals with lung disease are more likely to have GERD than individuals without lung disease.
- ✓ Among individuals with lung disease, GERD can make lung symptoms worse.
- ✓ Signs that GERD is making lung symptoms worse include:
  - Coughing more frequently with or without mucus, or a cough at night
  - Frequent pneumonias
- ✓ Individuals with GERD have more frequent exacerbations of lung disease. This is important — exacerbations are associated with more rapid loss of lung function, worse quality of life, and higher mortality among individuals with lung disease.
- ✓ Since GERD can worsen lung symptoms and lead to exacerbations, it is essential for individuals with lung disease who have GERD to treat this condition effectively.

**What are the Treatment Options for GERD?**

- ✓ Changes that can help manage GERD include:
  - Identifying and avoiding foods that trigger your symptoms, such as alcohol, caffeine, chocolate, citrus, or peppermint
  - Avoiding cigarettes and other tobacco products
  - Eating smaller meals
- ✓ GERD mostly occurs at night while sleeping. Symptoms can be reduced by avoiding food and beverages for 2 to 3 hours before going to bed. It can also help to elevate the head of your bed.
- ✓ Medications are often prescribed to treat GERD. These include famotidine (Pepcid) and Proton Pump Inhibitor (PPI) medications. Discuss long-term PPI medication use with your healthcare provider. Even if medication decreases your symptoms, stomach contents can still reflux into your throat or lungs.
- ✓ If lifestyle changes and medications are not effective, surgery may be a treatment option for GERD.