While the exact reasons are unknown, many patients with Sjögren’s suffer from gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD). This can cause a wide variety of symptoms that can be mistaken for other conditions. Symptoms may include persistent heartburn and/or regurgitation of acid, stomach pain, hoarseness or voice change, throat pain, sore throat, difficulty swallowing, sensation of having a lump in the throat, frequent throat clearing and chronic cough (especially at night time or upon awakening).

▶ Tips for combating gastroesophageal reflux in the throat:

- **Avoid lying flat during sleep.** Elevate the head of your bed using blocks or by placing a styrofoam wedge under the mattress. Do not rely on pillows as these may only raise the head but not the esophagus.

- **Don’t gorge yourself** at mealtime. Eat smaller more frequent meals and one large meal.

- **Avoid bedtime snacks** and eat meals at least three-four hours before lying down.

- **Lose any excess weight.**

- **Avoid spicy, acidic or fatty foods** including citrus fruits or juices, tomato-based products, peppermint, chocolate, and alcohol.

- **Limit your intake of caffeine** including coffee, tea and colas.

- **Stop smoking.**

- **Don’t exercise within one-two hours after eating.**

- **Promote saliva flow** by chewing gum, sucking on lozenges or taking prescription medications such as pilocarpine (Salagen®) and cevimeline (Evoxac®). This can help neutralize stomach acid and reduce symptoms.

- **Consult your doctor** if you have heartburn or take antacids more than three times per week. A variety of OTC and prescription medications can help but should only be taken with medical supervision.