

Patient Education Sheet

Reflux and Your Throat

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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 (Evxac[®]). This can help neutralize stomach acids and neutralize 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.

For more information on Sjögren's, visit the Foundation website at www.sjogrens.org, call 301-530-4420, email info@sjogrens.org, or write to the Sjögren's Foundation, 10701 Parkridge Blvd, Ste 170, Reston, VA 20191