

Dear Readers: This is the free newsletter of the Asthma & Allergy Foundation of America, Texas Chapter. If you do not wish to receive other newsletters from AAFA-TX, please request we remove your address. To subscribe, email your request to info@aafatexas.org. Addresses are never shared. Thank you. Please add new sender's email (joanhart@aafatexas.org) to your address book to ensure delivery. Welcome SAFER Houston, a food allergy, asthma and allergy support group affiliate of AAFA-TX.

Air It Out – Electronic Version. Vol. 16, Issue 9, #1 September 2009

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LINKS TO ASTHMA?

* Do you or your child have asthma? If you have increased asthma symptoms after eating or exercise, or increased asthma symptoms when lying down or frequent coughing or hoarseness, or asthma that isn't in control even when following your medication plan, then you may be one of the 70% of asthma patients who also have **GERD**.

* **GERD**, or gastroesophageal reflux disease, is a disease which affects the digestive system. Our digestive system produces acids to digest food; there is a sphincter valve at the top of the stomach which opens to allow food in, then, like a door, shuts when eating is complete and the digestive process begins and these acids start to form. At least that's what's supposed to happen. Environmental and behavioral factors like poor diet, lack of exercise and obesity has caused the number of Americans with diagnosed **GERD, a weakness in the valve**, to increase to 25 million. This weakness doesn't let the "door" shut completely so digestive acid backs up and can enter the respiratory tract causing asthma symptoms.

* Last year, Dr. Shu Liu of Duke University discovered that when we **inhale even tiny amounts of this stomach fluid** that backs up into the esophagus this creates changes in our immune system that can **result in someone acquiring asthma, the disease**, when this inhaling of stomach acids becomes a chronic or continual response.

* The study doesn't prove that everyone with GERD is going to develop asthma, but it does mean that **someone with GERD is more likely to develop asthma and may help explain why more adults are developing asthma**. More studies need to be done on the relationship of GERD and the development of asthma. There are **ways** people with GERD can help **reduce their gastric reflux response** (acid back-up) and lessen their chances of getting asthma: eat smaller meals and eat several hours before bedtime; raise the head of the bed a few inches so you're sleeping on an upward incline; sleep on your left side; maintain a healthy weight; limit coffee, tea, caffeine or fatty foods and alcohol because these foods cause that esophageal valve to relax and increases the acid reflux into the lungs. Studies have shown that if you do have GERD, **chewing sugar-free gum for 30 min. after eating reduces the amount of stomach acid** that backs up. There are medications to help reduce stomach acids too and a very successful endoscopic surgical repair to ensure the esophageal valve closes properly.

* **OBESITY** is now a problem world-wide: almost two-thirds of Americans are obese or so overweight that it presents a health problem. The health risks from the disease of obesity include diabetes, heart disease, urological problems, back and knee injuries and a general shortening of our lifespan and quality of life, not to mention the increased cost to our healthcare system. Social stigma and self esteem issues often surround those who are obese too, compounding the health problems. Now *CHEST* magazine has published a study that **links obesity to poor asthma control**. Scientists compared obese and non-obese asthma patients and discovered the **obese patients had poorer asthma control and less breath volume**. They believe this may suggest obese persons have a different genetic type of asthma. Overweight women have a 50% higher risk of developing asthma and obese women have a 75% risk of asthma.

* There may be a **link between environmental pollutants and developing asthma for some** persons. The types of **environmental hazards which can provoke asthma, the disease**, include exposure to fumes, gases, smoke, chemicals, or excessive exposure to extreme heat, cold or dryness. Some of these environmental triggers may be found in the workplace. **Environmental occupational factors** may cause 5 to 10% of adult onset asthma. If you're an adult and just acquired asthma, how can you tell if it's related to what you do for a living? Ask yourself these questions: Did your asthma start when you changed jobs? Do your asthma symptoms improve when you're away from work? Do you think something at work might be causing your asthma symptoms?

* OSHA or the Occupational Safety and Health Administration has a list of more than 250 potential work-related problems that could link to adult onset asthma. But **don't assume** just because some of these factors exist in your workplace that your asthma is caused by occupational hazards. You can be **exposed to many of these risks** in your **own home**, too. Keep a symptom diary and ask your healthcare provider to conduct various work-related asthma medical tests and evaluations. A detailed process, it is **difficult to link job environmental hazards to asthma since there are more non-occupational causes of the disease**.

* If you're a woman with a **waist size of more than 35 inches**, you have a 37% greater chance of getting asthma. The California Teachers Study, published in *Thorax*, says the extra body fat around the middle in women, even if they have a normal weight, may be the type of body fat (visceral fat) that could be acting in an inflammatory way and may lead to asthma. More study is needed but if you have a larger waistline, abdominal exercises to reduce this visceral fat may reduce your risk of adult onset asthma. For more information on asthma and allergies, contact info@aafatexas.org or see www.aafatexas.org

Upcoming AAFA-TX programs: 1) **Sept. 3**, "Asthma Management & Education" a CE program for nurses and respiratory therapists, Seattle, WA, instructor: Carol Lilley, RN, BSN, AE-C. Pre-registration required. Seattle Public School nurses are automatically pre-registered. 2) **Sept. 30** "Taking Control of Your Asthma & Allergies" a corporate wellness program, Citigroup Irving. Instructor: Andrew Beaty, MD. For more info contact info@aafatexas.org or see www.aafatexas.org/events

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