

Hope for the chronic cough

Infant dental exams are recommended. *by Dr. Susan Maples*

What do dull-looking or sensitive teeth, esophageal cancer and a chronic cough have in common? All can be the common result of acid reflux—when stomach juices back up into the swallowing and/or airway tubes. It's most often referred to as GERD; where the G stands for gastric (or stomach) and the E stands for esophagus (or section that extends from the vocal chord area down to the stomach). But "airway reflux" (AR) is when the acid creeps above the esophagus, and into the airway (throat/pharynx, mouth, nose, sinus cavities, bronchi and lungs).

Before the pain of heartburn or discomfort of indigestion, we often get silent reflux symptoms—like a hoarse voice, lump in the throat, post-nasal drip, tooth erosion, burping, bloating...and the chronic cough!

A cough is the body's way of clearing the lungs and breathing tubes of

unwanted debris, phlegm or sputum from a lung infection. But if you're clear of any lung problems, such as a cold, bronchitis, pneumonia, TB or lung cancer, your chronic cough might be from airway reflux. Keep in mind that airway reflux can cause chronic bronchitis and most doctors are not adept at diagnosing AR (also called laryngopharyngeal or esophageal reflux), as opposed to GERD.

Dr. Jamie Kaufman, author of *The Chronic Cough Enigma* suggests that 40 percent of chronic cough is from airway reflux, 14 percent have neurogenic (vagal nerve damaged) cough and 46 percent have both.

Acid splashing onto any of the above-the-stomach tissues can be more than annoying. The acid-burned inflammatory response can damage cells and sometimes progress into cancer.

Treating your reflux with OTC meds (such as Nexium, Prilosec, or Prevacid) often doesn't work long term and can be dangerous too. These tend to cause your

body to rebound with an over-production of acid when you stop taking them and their continued use can mask progressive disease and lead to bone thinning.

There is good news. Acid reflux can usually be treated with diet change and lifestyle/behavior modification. Steering clear of reflux causing foods, food additives and nighttime eating will help. That might also stimulate abdominal weight loss, which helps reduce reflux. In Kaufman's book *Dropping Acid, The Reflux Diet Cookbook*, she outlines the approach.

A good roadmap and an ounce of discipline will likely preserve your pearly whites, cure your chronic cough and maybe even save your life!



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