

Sleep Disturbance and Esophageal Reflux

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Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) is a chronic disorder of the esophagus with a spectrum of symptoms including heartburn and regurgitation. It has been estimated that 7% of individuals in the general population experience symptoms of this disease daily, and 14% have GERD symptoms at least once a week.¹ Nocturnal GERD occurs when gastric contents reflux into the esophagus while an individual is in a recumbent state. In 2000, the Gallup Organization, on behalf of the American Gastroenterological Association, conducted a nationwide telephone survey of 1000 adults experiencing heartburn at least once a week to help determine the impact of nighttime heartburn on sleep. Of these respondents, 79% reported heartburn at night and 75% reported that the symptoms affected their sleep.²

Beyond being a common and bothersome disease, nocturnal acid reflux has been associated with severe reflux-induced injuries including erosion, esophagitis, strictures, Barrett's esophagus, and perhaps adenocarcinoma due to direct and prolonged esophageal acid exposure.³⁻⁶ The relationship between sleep and GERD is further complicated by interesting data in which patients with self-described insomnia and no known history of GERD had improved sleep efficiency when administered a proton pump inhibitor (PPI).⁷ The necessity of sleep makes sleep disturbance a very important extraesophageal manifestation of GERD. This chapter will further evaluate the complex relationship between sleep and GERD.

PREVALENCE OF SLEEP DISTURBANCE AMONG PATIENTS WITH GERD

Although a large body of information exists about the prevalence of GERD in general, data specifically addressing the frequency and severity of nocturnal GERD are limited. It is now recognized that the majority of GERD patients experience nocturnal symptoms.