



# Health Bulletin



## GERD Costs America Nearly \$2 Billion Each Week In Lost Productivity

### *GI Disorder Affects 5 to 7 Percent of People Worldwide*

(NAPSA)—According to the International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders (IFFGD), most people with gastroesophageal reflux disease, or GERD, have mild symptoms with little risk of developing complications. But some GERD sufferers experience symptoms that profoundly affect their health and daily lives.

In fact, the American College of Gastroenterology reported that GERD symptoms cost the U.S. nearly \$2 billion each week in lost productivity. Yet a 2004 IFFGD survey showed that many Americans don't know what GERD is.

GERD is a chronic disorder in which acidic stomach contents reflux, or flow back, into the esophagus because the muscle between the two doesn't close properly. It often causes persistent symptoms such as chronic heartburn and "indigestion." Because nighttime heartburn can make it difficult to get a good night's rest, its recurrence can have a significant impact on sufferers' sleep and subsequently their work productivity—as well as on their overall quality of life.

"Treatment can alleviate the symptoms of GERD, as well as help sufferers avoid serious complications that, if left undiagnosed, can endanger their health and well-being," says Nancy J. Norton, IFFGD president. "By reducing nighttime heartburn symptoms, treatment also can help sufferers sleep better at night."

It is estimated that at least 5 to 7 percent of people worldwide suf-

fer from GERD, based on daily heartburn symptoms. Work productivity decreases are just one of the condition's effects. A study in the September-October 2005 *Journal of the American Board of Family Practice* found that GERD substantially altered health-related quality of life, negatively affecting not just work productivity and sleep but also routine activities such as exercise, housework and gardening. Psychosocial aspects of patient well-being were also impaired, including enjoyment of social gatherings, intimacy and sex.

Despite these facts, many GERD sufferers do not recognize it as a disease. Sometimes, there are no apparent symptoms, and the most frequent symptom, heartburn, is so common that its significance may be underestimated and casually dismissed.

"While occasional heartburn is generally not a cause for concern, recurring and frequent heartburn or other GERD symptoms can be signs of a more serious condition," says Norton. "The good news is that with diagnosis and treatment, these symptoms, and the discomfort they cause, can generally be controlled."

People who suspect they may have GERD should visit a physician or other health care provider for an accurate diagnosis. If diagnosed, patients can work with their providers to develop treatment plans. To learn more about GERD, visit [www.aboutgerd.org](http://www.aboutgerd.org) or call IFFGD at 1-888-964-2001.

While chronic heartburn is the most common symptom of GERD, and acid regurgitation is another common symptom, numerous other symptoms may also be associated with GERD. These may include:

- Belching
- Difficulty or pain when swallowing
- Waterbrash (sudden excess of saliva)
- Dysphagia (the sensation of food sticking in the esophagus)
- Chronic sore throat
- Laryngitis
- Inflammation of the gums
- Erosion of the enamel of the teeth
- Chronic irritation in the throat
- Hoarseness in the morning
- A sour taste
- Bad breath

Chest pain may indicate acid reflux. Nevertheless, this kind of pain or discomfort should prompt urgent medical evaluation. Possible heart conditions must always be excluded first.

Relief of symptoms after a two-week trial therapy with an antacid drug called a proton pump inhibitor is an indication that GERD is the cause. This can also be confirmed with pH monitoring, which measures the level of acid refluxing into the esophagus and as high as the larynx. To learn more about GERD, and about how best to discuss your symptoms with your health care provider, visit [www.aboutgerd.org](http://www.aboutgerd.org) or call IFFGD at 1-888-964-2001.