



August 2013

## Acid Reflux

Is it eating at your teeth? By *Dr Susan Maples*.

Q: My dentist said I have some unexplainable erosion of my enamel. I also have heartburn. A friend told me they might be related. Is that possible?

A: Your friend is very astute. Heartburn is also called Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) and is sometimes called “acid reflux”. It results from the contents of the stomach leaking backwards into the esophagus—but also to the mouth. It is a condition that currently affects 33% of all Americans, a statistic that is unfortunately on the rise, along with several other obesity related illnesses. GERD can affect people of all ages and has a variety of undesirable symptoms. Besides being linked to enamel erosion (especially on back teeth), acid reflux is linked to asthma, voice disorders and Barrett’s Esophagus, which increases the risk of esophageal cancer.

Regarding your teeth: Stomach acid dissolves enamel. The acid bath also promotes tooth decay. Here’s how: the acid-producing bacteria breaks down the enamel in a specific site and the acidic environment caused by GERD interrupts the saliva’s ability to neutralize and replenish the surface. In addition, if you happen to grind your teeth, the wear on the biting surfaces is enhanced by the acid as well. It all makes sense, right?

If you want to learn the risk factors and telltale signs for GERD, simply take the test below. To take it electronically go to [www.selfscreen.net](http://www.selfscreen.net).

**Do you have Acid Reflux?** *Yes=2 points, Occasionally=1 point, No=0 points*

- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you smoke?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Are you more than 10% above your ideal body weight?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you experience frequent heartburn or chest pains (primarily after eating)?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you have difficulty breathing or swallowing?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you feel as if there is a constant lump in your throat?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you experience regurgitation?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you experience post-nasal drip or excess throat mucus?

- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you suffer from a chronic cough?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you experience frequent choking episodes?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you suffer from indigestion, burping, nausea after eating, or stomach bloating?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you feel hoarseness in your throat primarily in the mornings?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Does it seem you are prone to tooth decay or acid erosion of your enamel?

**Score total points:**

1-3 Unlikely that you have Acid Reflux: Learn more about prevention

4-6 Low suspicion of Acid Reflux: Seek consultation

7-10 Moderate suspicion of Acid Reflux: Seek consultation

11+ High suspicion of Acid Reflux: Get immediate attention.

If you suspect GERD, don't worry, as it is quite treatable. Your physician along with your dentist can help you manage your reflux *and* protect your teeth.