



Embargoed for release until:
Monday, October 31, 2005

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New Studies on Nighttime Acid Reflux Point to “Silent” Reflux Symptoms as a Cause of Poor Sleep and Indicate Role in Sleep Apnea

HONOLULU, October 31, 2005 -- Patients with sleep complaints but no heartburn symptoms suffered episodes of nighttime acid reflux according to research presented at the 70th Annual Scientific Meeting of the American College of Gastroenterology. In a separate study, researchers found that symptoms of gastroesophageal reflux (GER) are common and frequently severe in patients with obstructive sleep apnea.

Patients with gastroesophageal reflux commonly report poor sleep, waking at night because of acid reflux. Some individuals who have respiratory problems exacerbated by acid reflux may frequently be without symptoms of heartburn. In a study of 81 patients with documented sleep complaints at least three nights per week who underwent polysomnographic sleep evaluations, 26 percent had acid reflux. Of those who suffered with reflux, 94 percent of the recorded reflux events were associated with arousal from sleep or awakening.

“These are patients without significant heartburn symptoms, who are experiencing acid reflux during sleep,” explained William C. Orr, Ph.D. of Lynn Health Science Institute in Oklahoma City, OK. “‘Silent reflux’ may be the cause of sleep disturbances in patients with unexplained sleep disorders.”

In another study on GERD and sleep presented by researchers at Duke University Medical Center at the ACG Annual Scientific Meeting, GER symptoms were common and frequently severe in 168 patients undergoing sleep studies who reported symptoms consistent with sleep apnea. These patients had frequent daytime and nighttime heartburn symptoms. Those with sleep apnea reported much lower quality of life on a self-administered questionnaire. Those

patients with sleep apnea who also reported moderate to severe nighttime GER reported even worse quality of life.

“All patients with sleep apnea should be evaluated for gastroesophageal reflux,” said J. Barry O’Connor, M.D., of Duke University Medical Center, one of the investigators.

About the American College of Gastroenterology

The ACG was formed in 1932 to advance the scientific study and medical treatment of disorders of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract. The College promotes the highest standards in medical education and is guided by its commitment to meeting the needs of clinical gastroenterology practitioners. Consumers can get more information on GI diseases through the following ACG-sponsored programs:

- 1-800-978-7666 (free brochures on common GI disorders, including ulcer, colon cancer, gallstones, and liver disease)
- 1-866-IBS-RELIEF and www.ibsrelief.org (free educational materials)
- 1-800-HRT-BURN (free brochure and video on heartburn and GERD)
- www.acg.gi.org (ACG’s Web site)

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