

## Gastroenterology

# Gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD)

When we eat, food passes from the mouth down the oesophagus (gullet) and into the stomach. Food is then digested by acid and other chemicals made by cells in the stomach lining. These cells also make mucus to protect the stomach from acid damage. The cells in the oesophagus are different and they have little protection from acid.

Between the oesophagus and stomach, there is a ring of muscle called a 'sphincter'. The sphincter relaxes to allow food to pass from the oesophagus into the stomach. Then it tightens up to stop food and acid from moving back up into the oesophagus.

## What are acid reflux and oesophagitis?

**Acid reflux** is when acid leaks up ("refluxes") into the oesophagus.

**Oesophagitis** is inflammation of the lining of the oesophagus. Oesophagitis may be caused by the reflux of stomach acid which irritates the lining of the oesophagus.

## Gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD)

Gastro-oesophagus reflux disease (GORD) is a general term to describe when stomach acid goes back up into the oesophagus and causes symptoms. A person may have acid reflux with or without oesophagitis.



### **What are the causes of GORD?**

There are many causes for GORD, including:

- Weakening of the sphincter between the oesophagus and stomach.
- When the pressure in the stomach is greater than the sphincter can withstand. This may happen during pregnancy, after a large meal or when bending forward.

### **What are the symptoms of acid reflux and oesophagitis?**

**Heartburn** is the most common symptom. This is a burning feeling in the centre of the chest and can be worse especially after a meal or when lying flat. Rather confusingly, heartburn has nothing to do with the heart.

#### **Other common symptoms:**

- Feeling sick
- An acid taste in your mouth (often described as a “bitter” taste)
- Burning pain when swallowing
- Belching

### **What can I do to help reduce my symptoms?**

Everyone is different. Lifestyle changes may help you to manage your symptoms better. You should consider lifestyle changes in addition to any advice or medications your doctor has given you.

#### **Try to lose weight if you're overweight**

Being overweight puts extra pressure on your stomach and lower oesophageal sphincter. So losing weight may ease symptoms of acid reflux.

If you are overweight, **losing weight is the best thing** you can do to improve your symptoms. If you want help losing weight, please ask your GP.

## Patient Information

General advice for losing weight:

- Make realistic, long-lasting changes to your diet. Avoid 'fad diets'.
- Have regular small meals and don't skip breakfast.
- Cut down on sugary foods and drinks.
- Daily exercise – even if this is a short walk, small changes can make a big difference.
- Swap snacks for healthier options like fruit or vegetables.

### Night-time acid reflux

If you experience acid reflux at bedtimes, consider making the following changes:

- **Avoid going to bed on a full stomach.** Eat your meals earlier and do not eat in the 3 hours before going to bed.
- **Lie on your left-hand side. Raising the head of the bed** or sleeping with more pillows under your head helps to keep the acid in your stomach when lying down.

### Cut down on certain foods and drinks

Some foods or drinks may trigger acid reflux.

You may benefit from cutting down on; caffeine (tea & coffee), alcohol, spicy foods, fizzy drinks, fatty foods, chocolate, peppermint (including chewing gum), citrus fruits and juices, onions and tomatoes.

Fatty foods tend to delay the emptying of your stomach and thus worsen symptoms. Try cutting out the above foods and see what works for you.

Remember to drink plenty of water.

### Eat smaller, more frequent meals

It's better to have smaller meals throughout the day rather than eating lots of food and drink in one sitting. Try to eat meals more slowly, and sit upright when eating.

## Patient Information

### **Quit smoking**

Cigarettes reduce the amount of saliva you produce and can cause the sphincter muscle to relax. This makes it more likely that stomach acid will leak up into the oesophagus. Stopping smoking will reduce symptoms of acid reflux as well as have many other health benefits.

The NHS Stop Smoking Services are a great way to help you quit.

### **Certain medications**

Some medicines may cause the sphincter muscle to weaken, or irritate the lining of the oesophagus. Painkillers (such as aspirin and ibuprofen) and other drugs, including calcium channel blockers, nitrates and diazepam, may make acid reflux symptoms worse.

If you think a medication may be causing symptoms of acid reflux, consult your doctor before stopping any medications.

### **Avoid stress and keep active**

Try to do 30 minutes of exercise most days of the week. This can also help with weight loss. To avoid having reflux when exercising, it's recommended to:

- eat after exercise
- do not eat immediately before exercise

### **When should I seek help?**

Be sure to seek medical advice if:

- you have symptoms several times a week
- your symptoms are getting worse and/or are more frequent
- you have difficulty swallowing
- you vomit or cough up blood
- you have unintentionally lost weight

## Patient Information

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, please contact 024 7696 6106 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke-free policy.

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