

Lifestyle and dietary advice for acid reflux



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What is it?

Acid reflux is a common condition where the acid contents of the stomach leak (back up) into the oesophagus (food pipe) ¹.

If this happens recurrently it is called **gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD)**

It mostly happens as the **lower oesophageal sphincter (LOS)** - a strong ring of muscle at the base of the oesophagus) becomes relaxed.

It is commonly also known as 'reflux' or 'heartburn'.

10-30% of adults in developed countries suffer from reflux ².

Women are affected more often than men, though **men** can have worse symptoms.



Lower
Oesophageal
sphincter (LOS)

Oesophagus

Stomach
contracted

Acid and stomach
contents
back up into
Oesophagus

Stomach

Common symptoms of GORD ³

Sour taste in
the mouth

Erosion of the
enamel of the
teeth

Dry recurrent
cough or sore
throat

Hoarse
voice

Bad
breath

Pain in
throat when
swallowing

Burning
sensation in the
centre of chest

Bloating and
feeling sick

Risk factors of GORD ¹

- **Smoking** and **alcohol** • **Pregnancy**
- **Obesity** • **Stress** and **anxiety**
- **Triggering foods** like chocolate, coffee or fatty food which can relax the LOS and delay the contents of stomach to move forward. These can also include peppermint, garlic and chillies.
- **Certain drugs** like painkillers (non-steroidal anti-inflammatories specifically) can also relax the LOS
- **Family history** • **Lack of hydration**
- **Lack of fibre** in diet
- **Processed food** and **carbonated drinks**
- **Sedentary lifestyle**



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It is **important to seek medical help** and discuss with your health professional (especially if over the age of 50) if you have:

Red flags

Symptoms of **heartburn / reflux** associated with **persistent vomiting**

Weight loss

Pain on swallowing



Loss of appetite

Food seems to be sticking in the food pipe

If symptoms do not improve in 4-6 weeks

Lifestyle and dietary changes that help to reduce GORD ⁵⁻¹¹

Reducing alcohol intake, smoking and vaping



Maintaining a healthy body weight reduces the pressure on the LOS



Reducing caffeine intake

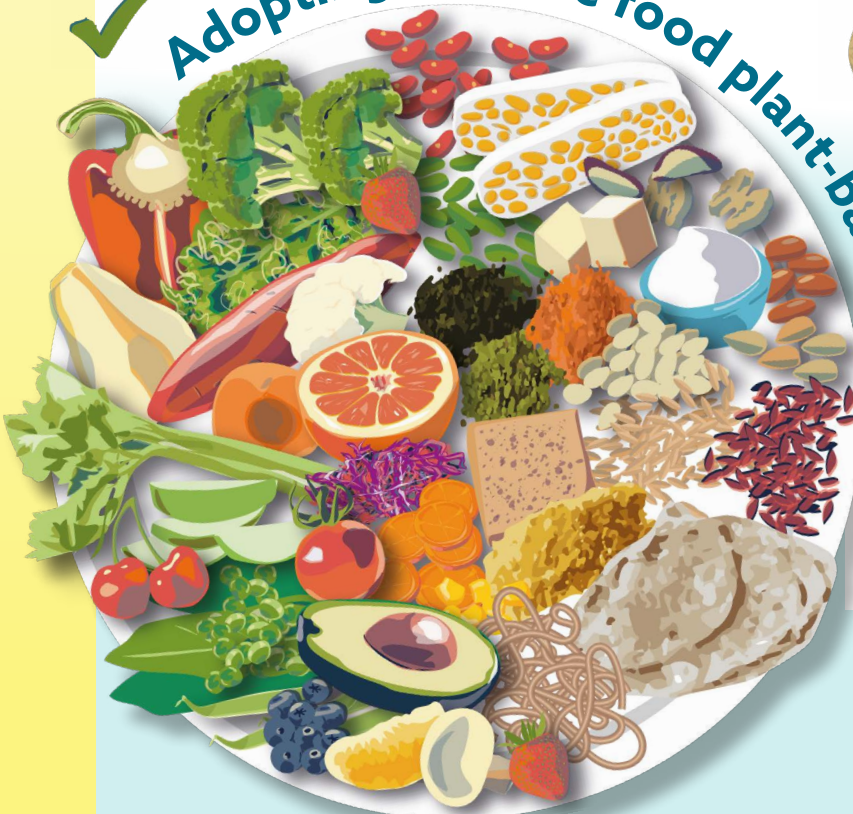


Avoiding late night meals and snacks - **aim** to eat at least three hours before bed

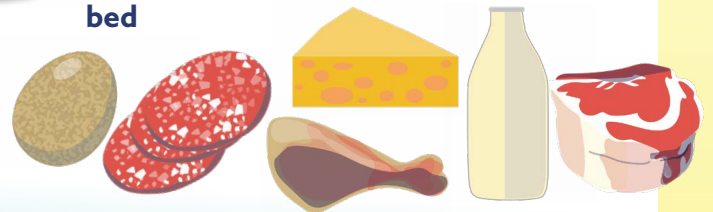
Avoiding heavily processed food and fried food



Adopting a whole food plant-based diet



A whole food plant-based diet increases fibre and anti-oxidant intake, which is **helpful** in improving gastric emptying.



Reduced intake of **animal products** including **dairy, meat, eggs and fish** is effective for limiting reflux. The same is seen when **saturated fat intake is reduced**. This is why reflux symptoms are less common with a vegetarian/vegan diet.



There are some **plant ingredients** that show some evidence of being **helpful** in **reducing symptoms of GORD**, including **ginger, fenugreek seeds, amla and aloe vera**. Including these as part of a healthy diet may be helpful, but they are **unlikely to offer significant improvements independent of other dietary improvements**.

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- ✓ **Eating mindfully**, chewing the food properly as well as **avoiding big meals** especially **towards the end of the day** has been seen to be helpful in reducing reflux.



Avoiding tight clothing around the **waist** can help **reduce pressure..**



Avoiding very **hot and spicy** food.

Raising the head side of the bed by a few inches can **reduce** the acid coming into the food pipe.



Managing stress and anxiety, for example, with **meditation, exercise** and **being in nature**.

Aiming for at least **7-8 hours of sleep**. Sleeping on the **left side** has been seen to be helpful too.



Drinking water during meal times can reduce the acid required to digest food properly, hence it is best to **avoid drinking while having a meal**, however **staying hydrated** throughout the day, at all other times is **important**.

- ✓ **Exercise** **Aiming for 150 minutes of exercise** in form of **cycling, jogging, swimming, brisk walking**, or any activity which one **enjoys**, would be ideal.

Exercise will help maintain healthy weight and improve the gut motility, both of which reduce reflux.



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