

## 2. What causes Reflux?

Immediately after meal time is the time we are most likely to experience some form of indigestion, usually bringing up wind, eating less or avoiding fizzy drinks should help avoid or reduce indigestion. Exercise may also sometimes bring on the symptoms of reflux.

But, in many other cases, this feeling of indigestion lasts longer or is more uncomfortable. In these cases it is likely that the reflux is being caused by the levels of acid being produced in the stomach.



If you experience any of the following symptoms, it is recommended that you talk to your local GP:

- Weight loss
- Loss of appetite
- Difficulty or pain when swallowing
- Vomiting blood
- Passing bloody stools

Most reflux patients will suffer only the more common symptoms. Some people, however, will suffer from physical damage to the tissue in their throat. This is caused by stomach acid repeatedly entering the oesophagus. In these cases it will be important to seek medical treatment as soon as possible to prevent further damage.



## 3. Treating Reflux

Whatever your level of discomfort when experiencing reflux, there is no need for you to suffer in silence.

In particular, if your symptoms are more frequent or more uncomfortable than simply mild or passing reflux, you should seek advice from your GP.

### → Lifestyle Changes & Tips

Before considering medication, you may benefit from making small but significant changes to your lifestyle. In fact, many people enjoy complete freedom from their symptoms by making these changes:

- Eat smaller, more frequent meals
- Avoid fatty foods; eat fruit every day if possible
- Get plenty of fibre in your diet
- Avoid spicy food, especially if it causes problems for you
- Be physically active, & try to achieve your ideal weight
- Smoke less often or ideally not at all
- Reduce your consumption of alcohol
- Drink less caffeine
- Don't go to bed straight after meal time
- If taking medication, take it at the same time every day
- If you suffer more from night time reflux, elevate the head of your bed. Lying on your left side is often more comfortable than lying on your right side

## ➔ Medication

There are many treatment options available to patients. Your pharmacist can advise you regarding common over-the-counter products (products which do not require a prescription).

These may include:

1. Antacids: these drugs neutralise stomach acid for a short while
2. Alginates: these act by protecting the stomach lining
3. Antispasmodics: these act by relaxing the muscles in the stomach wall and aiding digestion
4. H2 Antagonists: these act by suppressing the production of stomach acid

There are also a broad range of prescription medicines available if the above treatment options do not get results for you. These include a class of drugs called 'Proton Pump Inhibitors', (or 'PPIs') and several 'Prokinetic Drugs'. PPIs work by regulating and greatly reducing the levels of stomach acid and provide more sustained relief than H2 antagonists. Prokinetic drugs help the movement of food through the digestive system.



## → Foods to avoid

Some people find that certain foods trigger their reflux symptoms:

- Citrus fruits (orange, lemon, grapefruit etc.)
- Some drinks (alcohol, coffee, tea, fizzy drinks)
- Raw onions and spicy foods
- Some dairy products (sour cream, milk shakes, ice cream, cottage cheese)
- Fats / oils (e.g. salad dressing)
- Sweets or puddings with high fat content

By following the advice of your doctor and sticking to your course of medicine, it is very likely that you will be able to live symptom-free now and into the future.



## 4. Consulting your General Practitioner

Most cases of moderate or severe reflux can be dealt with by just talking with your GP. Before your visit, think about the following questions:

- When do you get indigestion?
- What makes it worse or better?
- Have you lost any weight recently?
- Besides indigestion, do you have any other symptoms?
- Have you tried any solutions already?
- Are you or could you be pregnant?

The chances are your GP will be able to recommend a treatment to relieve your symptoms.

In some less frequent cases, it may be possible to conduct some further tests to get the most accurate diagnosis of your condition. If your GP suspects you have a stomach ulcer, or if different medications have not worked for you, your GP may consider some of the following tests:

- A simple blood test
- An endoscopy (a physical exam of your throat)
- Barium X-Ray (less common than an endoscopy)
- H.Pylori test (if you are thought to have a stomach ulcer)

