

LIFESTYLE CHANGES TO MANAGE HEARTBURN/ ACID REFLUX

This is an information sheet about heartburn or else known acid reflux. It provides you with some basic information on the symptoms you might experience and also tips on how you can make changes to your day-to-day habits that can help alleviate your symptoms.

What is heartburn/ acid reflux?

Our stomach contains acid in its juices which helps break down the food we eat and also kills bacteria. When there is backward flow of this acid in the tube that connects the stomach to the throat (gullet or else called oesophagus), people may experience heartburn.

What are the symptoms of heartburn/acid reflux?

There are different symptoms that people experience. They can describe a burning sensation in the middle of their chest, or an unpleasant/ sour taste in their mouth, persistent sore throat without having a throat infection, recurrent cough, a hoarse voice, bad breath or feeling sick quite often.



Image by Tharakorn

What causes heartburn/ acid reflux?

Many people can experience symptoms from time to time. There is not always an obvious reason why, but sometimes the symptoms are caused or made worse by:

- ❖ Certain foods/ drinks (see below)
- ❖ Smoking
- ❖ Being pregnant
- ❖ Stress/ anxiety
- ❖ Living with overweight/ obesity
- ❖ Certain medication
- ❖ A hiatus hernia (when part of the upper stomach slides in your chest)

So what can I do to manage my symptoms?

There are plenty things you can change in your daily habits that can be useful in alleviating your symptoms from acid reflux before having to think about using any medication or having to rely on them longterm.

✓ Eat small and frequent meals

When your stomach is very full, it is more likely to have backward flow of acid in the gullet. So reducing your meal portions and eating more frequently can make a big difference.

✓ Avoid foods that can trigger your symptoms

There are certain foods that can increase the acidity of the stomach juices and cause/ aggravate your acid reflux symptoms. These include: fatty/greasy foods, fried foods, spicy foods, tomato sauces, peppers, onions, garlic, mint, chocolate, citrus fruits.



Image by Happy_lark



Image by LauriPatterson

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✓ Avoid drinks that can trigger your symptoms

As with certain foods, there are certain types of drinks that can play a role in developing or worsening your reflux symptoms. These are mainly alcohol, caffeinated drinks (coffee, normal tea, coca cola, chocolate), fizzy drinks, certain juices (e.g. orange, tangerine, lemon).



Image by LamplighterSDV

✓ Avoid vigorous activity after eating

Allow yourself at least a couple of hours before engaging in physical activity, especially one involving bending over or using your abdominal muscles, as this can push acid up to your gullet. Milder activities, like walking, are fine to do after a meal.



Image by subjug

✓ Avoid lying down just after you eat

It is best to avoid lying down after a meal for at least 3-4 hours to avoid stomach content and acid moving up in your gullet.

✓ Raise the upper part of your bed when sleeping

It can be useful to raise the upper part of the bed (or use a wedge shaped pillow) so that your chest and head are at a higher level than your waist.



Image by Sezeryadigar

✓ Quit smoking

If you are a smoker, it might be a good time to think about quitting as, apart from all the other known harm smoking can cause, it can also induce or worsen heartburn symptoms.

✓ Lose weight

If you are leaving with overweight or obesity or there is increased weight around your abdomen, losing weight can reduce the pressure to the stomach. Also, avoid clothes that are too tight around the waist.



Image by Aleksandr Potashev

✓ Check your medication

There are certain medication that can either cause or trigger acid reflux related symptoms. Examples of such medication can be certain antibiotics, anti-inflammatories (e.g. ibuprofen), aspirin, HRT (hormone replacement therapy), osteoporosis medication (e.g. alendronate), iron supplements. Speak to your doctor if you think any of your medication could play a role to your symptoms.



Image by solareseven

✓ Manage stress

Stress can be a triggering factor for acid reflux. Getting enough sleep, learning relaxation techniques (mindfulness, meditation, etc.) or asking for help to manage your stress can help.