

Reflux

Also known as GORD (gastro oesophageal reflux disease) or in USA, GERD (gastro esophageal reflux disorder)

Reflux occurs when acid digestive juices from the stomach make their way up the food pipe (oesophagus) and spill up into the throat. In severe cases this can be felt as heartburn or indigestion. It is a common problem, particularly for pregnant women, smokers, people over 40 & anyone who has a hiatus hernia.

You should always consult your doctor if you think you have reflux.

The food pipe has two rings of muscle (sphincters), one at the top in the throat and one just before it enters the stomach. They are normally closed (except when you are swallowing) and prevent the contents of the stomach returning to the mouth. But, under certain conditions, these do not always work perfectly. In fact, most of us have a low level of reflux most of the time, but are completely unaware of it. This level of reflux does not harm us or our voices.

What happens when we have reflux?

The presence of acid from the stomach causes the mucus in the larynx, which should be thin & watery, to become thick and sticky. This is what makes us want to cough, clear the throat & sound husky. It can cause inflammation in the food pipe and vocal tract. In severe cases the acid can cause damage to the tissues – similar to an acid burn. This can lead to other complications.

Symptoms – can occur at any time of day or night but most likely to occur after meals. Symptoms may also be worse in the morning and improve gradually during the day.

Symptoms can include :

Hoarse or husky voice

Persistent cough which does not respond to antibiotics or other cough treatments

A feeling of needing to clear the throat

Feeling of a lump in the throat

Heartburn

What action to take. These are mostly lifestyle changes.

Lose weight

Stop smoking – smoking negatively affects the lower sphincter and presence of acid in throat makes the mucous thick & sticky. Vocal folds need thin, fine mucous covering to work well.

Do not eat or drink (especially alcohol) late at night or less than 2 - 3 hours before lying down.

Do not lie down after a meal.

Do not sit or stand in a slumped posture. If you have a slouched posture there is no straight path.

between the stomach and oesophagus and muscles around the oesophagus can go into a spasm. Gas and acidity get blocked in the spasm, causing coughing and other asthma-like symptoms.

Do not wear tight clothing, belts &c.

Cut down on tea & coffee – drink more water.

Do not take large doses of vitamin C, especially before bedtime.

Avoid fatty foods, fried foods, spicy foods (they affect the lower sphincter and delay stomach emptying).

Avoid chocolate & peppermint.

Do not drink carbonated or gaseous drinks.

Avoid milk based products late at night – milk is fatty & has calcium (which increases stomach acidity).

Some vegetables can make it worse - onions, cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, spinach, brussel sprouts.

Eat small quantities more frequently, rather than large meals.

Raise the head of the bed.

Sleeping on the left side can reduce night time reflux.

Antacids may help.

Always consult a doctor if symptoms persist. Reflux can cause severe long term disorders.