



Reflux and heartburn

You came to the emergency department with burning pain in your chest or upper belly. The doctor examined you and did any tests needed today. The most likely cause is acid reflux. This sheet explains how to ease it.

What is it?

Reflux happens when acid from the stomach flows back up into the food pipe. It can cause a burning feeling behind the breastbone (heartburn), a sour taste, burping or a cough. It is often worse after large meals, at night, or when lying down or bending over. Smoking, alcohol, extra weight and some foods can make it worse.

Looking after yourself at home

- Eat smaller meals, and avoid eating in the 3 hours before bed.
- Raise the head end of your bed a little, or use an extra pillow.
- Notice which foods or drinks trigger it, such as fatty or spicy food, coffee, chocolate or fizzy drinks, and cut down.
- Stop smoking and cut down on alcohol.
- Losing extra weight and avoiding tight belts can help a lot.

Medicines

- Antacids from the pharmacy can ease symptoms quickly. Follow the packet or your doctor's instructions.
- If you were given an acid-reducing medicine, take it as directed, usually before a meal.
- Ibuprofen, aspirin and similar painkillers can make reflux worse. Ask your doctor or pharmacist before taking them.

Follow-up

- See your family doctor or health centre if symptoms are not better after 2 to 4 weeks.
- See them soon if you are losing weight without trying, or you are over 55 with new symptoms.
- See them if you keep needing medicine for reflux.

Come back to the emergency department or call an ambulance straight away if:

- Chest pain that spreads to your arm, jaw, neck or back, or comes with sweating or breathlessness
- Vomiting blood, or vomit that looks like coffee grounds
- Black, sticky stools
- Food getting stuck when you swallow, or you cannot swallow
- Severe belly pain that does not settle



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This leaflet is general information to support the advice your doctor or nurse gave you today. It does not replace their advice. If you are worried, seek medical help.

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