

Speech and Language Therapy - Acid Reflux and Swallowing

Acid reflux is a digestive disease whereby the liquid content of the stomach (stomach acid) comes up into the oesophagus (towards your throat), causing a burning pain in the lower chest area, often after eating. If it keeps happening, it's called gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD).

Dysphagia can be seen as a side effect of acid reflux. The heartburn and regurgitation that are associated with acid reflux can make it difficult to swallow certain foods and fluids, leading to dysphagia.

The main **symptoms** of acid reflux are:

- **Heartburn** – a burning sensation in the middle of your chest
- An unpleasant **sour taste** in your mouth, caused by stomach acid

You may also have:

- A **cough** or **hiccups** that keep coming back
- A **hoarse voice**
- **Bad breath**
- **Bloating** and **feeling sick**

Tips and strategies to help with acid reflux:

- **Avoid foods that may cause your acid reflux to worsen**, such as: high fat foods, tomatoes, citrus fruits, chocolates, garlic, onions, spicy food, caffeine and mint
- Take **Gaviscon Advance** with or without prescribed medication (always consult your GP before taking additional medication). This should be taken regularly at the end of every meal, before any strenuous exercises and last thing before going to bed.
- **Sit upright when eating and drinking** and remain upright for at least 1 hour after
- Avoid larger meals and **eat smaller meals throughout the day**
- **Avoid coffee** and other caffeinated beverages
- **Avoid tight clothing** in the abdominal area e.g. belts, tight elastic waistbands.
- **Stop smoking** nicotine
- **Do not eat within 3 hours of going to bed** to give time for your stomach to digest your meal
- **Sleep on your left side**, as this can prevent any remaining food in the stomach from pressing on the opening of your oesophagus, which can lead to reflux.
- **Elevate the head of the bed**, or use pillows to prop your head up, to allow gravity to help ease the reflux. Your chest and head should be above the level of your waist, so stomach acid does not travel up towards your throat

If you are still concerned about your acid reflux, speak to your GP.