

Dietary and lifestyle advice for reflux

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What is acid reflux and why does it happen?

When we eat and drink it goes down the oesophagus (food pipe) to our stomach, where digestion starts. This process happens by acids being released to break down our food. Acid reflux (also known as dyspepsia) happens when food or drink that have been mixed with this acid travels back up the oesophagus.

Normally, a muscle called a sphincter stops this reflux but for some people this muscle isn't working as well as we would like it to which can cause discomfort.

What are the symptoms?

- Heartburn
- Feeling sick
- An acid taste in the mouth
- Bloating

These symptoms can very much come and go but tend to be worse after a meal. Some people feel that food contents can 'repeat' on them by coming back up the oesophagus, or even to the throat and mouth.

Who can get acid reflux?

Anyone can suffer from acid reflux, but it is more common in:

- People who smoke
- Pregnant women
- Heavy alcohol drinkers
- People who are overweight
- Those aged between 35-64

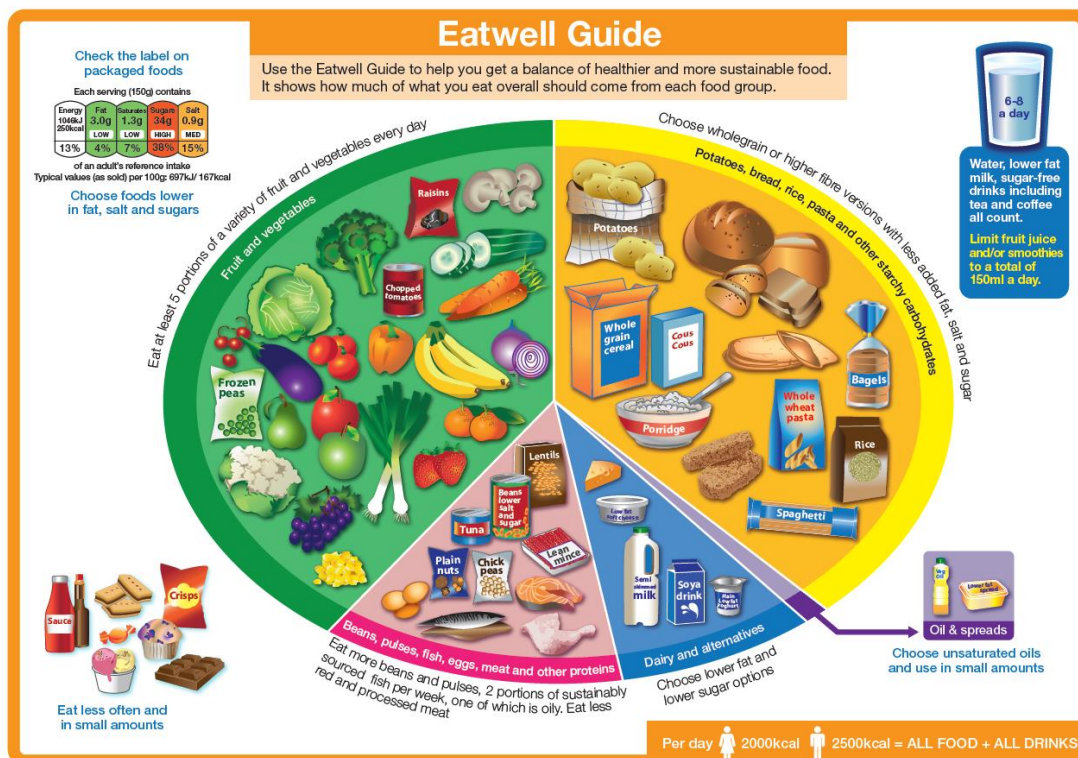
Lifestyle tips to help

- Elevating the head of the bed
- Having good posture – Lying down, bending forward and hunching over can encourage acid reflux. Wearing tight clothes around your abdomen can also put extra pressure on the stomach making acid reflux worse.
- Weight loss – If you are overweight (BMI greater than 30kg/m²), losing weight may help with reflux severity and frequency (as it will reduce the level of pressure on your stomach). If you want support on weight loss, NHS website www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight is a good place to start with but you can also ask your GP to refer you to the dietitians if you need more in-depth support.
- Stopping smoking – If you want more advice or support with this, contact the local Devon Stop Smoking Service (OneSmallStep) on 01392 908139 or email hello@onesmallstep.org.uk.
- Managing your stress levels – Stress can be relieved through activity, practicing relaxation and psychotherapy such as cognitive behaviour therapy. For more information on this, visit TalkWorks North Devon at www.dpt.nhs.uk/locations/talkworks-depression-and-anxiety-service-north-devon or call the helpline on 0300 555 3344.

Dietary advice

Making small changes to your diet and dietary pattern can greatly help to reduce reflux symptoms. Below are some suggestions to start with:

- Following a healthy balanced diet as recommended in the Eatwell Guide below.



- Eat smaller regular meals.
- Try to eat slowly and avoid eating on the 'run'. Sitting upright, preferably at a table, can help with symptoms.
- Excess alcohol has been shown to exacerbate reflux symptoms but it is also important for your overall health to not exceed the guidance of 14 units per week. If you would like more information on this, visit www.nhs.uk/live-well/alcohol-advice/calculating-alcohol-units or www.nhs.uk/better-health/drink-less/#tips-to-help-you-cut-down-on-alcohol
- Some people find that it is helpful to take fluids in between meals rather than at meal times.
- Research on avoiding certain foods is limited but people do report anecdotally that the below food can trigger reflux. If you noticed any trend when eating the below foods, you may wish to reduce your intake of them:
 - Spicy food
 - Fatty foods to include chocolate
 - Caffeinated drinks
 - Tomato based products
 - Citrus fruits and juices

However, if your symptoms do not improve after cutting out these foods, they can then be reintroduced to your diet one at a time. It is important to not cut out foods unnecessarily.

- Avoid eating at least 2 hours before going to bed.
- Avoid bending, lifting or lying down straight after each meal as this can bring on symptoms.

Further information

Nutrition and Dietetics Department (Northern Services)
Suite 2 Munro House

Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
Barnstaple

Tel: 01271 322306 (between 8am-4pm)

Support

Guts Charity

<https://gutscharity.org.uk/advice-and-information/symptoms/heartburn-and-reflux/>

London office: Guts UK, 3 St Andrews Place, London, NW1 4LB

Email: info@gutscharity.org.uk

Phone: 020 7486 0341

References

Newbury, C. & Lynch, K. (2019)

The role of diet in the development and management of gastroesophageal reflux disease: why we feel the burn

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6702398/>

NHS – Heartburn and reflux

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/heartburn-and-acid-reflux/>

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or email rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

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