

# Patient information

## Reflux

### What is reflux?

Stomach acid is made up of digestive acids and enzymes to break up food material. Reflux is caused when this acid travels up into the oesophagus, and sometimes this can reach as far as the throat and mouth.

When reflux occurs, the acid irritates the throat causing symptoms such as a bitter taste in the mouth and discomfort or a burning sensation in the throat. Reflux can also happen 'silently' (with no symptoms). Reflux can cause an increased production of mucus (the bodies' attempt to soothe the burning from the acid). This can then lead to excessive throat clearing, coughing or a feeling of a lump in the throat. A combination of the irritation on and around the vocal folds from the acid and the potential excessive throat clearing and coughing can spoil the voice and its quality (e.g., hoarseness/gruffness). Taking Gaviscon Advance before bed helps to protect the vocal folds from the effects of the acid as it provides a barrier over the stomach contents, so that acid cannot reach the throat.

Reflux may be caused or increased by what and how we eat and drink, our lifestyles (busy, stressful, or sedentary lifestyles, for example) and some medications, such as steroids, immunosuppressants or painkillers.

### Symptoms

- Frequent throat clearing
- Chronic cough
- A hoarse, tight, or croaky voice
- Sensation of a lump in the throat or a feeling of food sticking in the throat
- A sore, dry, and sensitive throat
- A feeling of increased mucus/phlegm in the throat
- An unpleasant 'bilious' taste at the back of the mouth

- Excessive burping
- A hoarse or croaky voice.

## How to reduce reflux

- Eat less in the evening, do not eat within 3-4 hours of bedtime
- Eat smaller, more frequent meals. It is important to avoid intermittent fasting as this can cause the body to produce acid all day due to inconsistent/erratic timings of meals
- Eat slowly
- Sit in an upright position whilst eating
- Avoid eating 'on the run'
- Elevate the head of the bed by 4-6 inches by placing supports under the bed or adding more pillows
- Do not lie down after eating
- Drink plenty of water
- Avoid fizzy drinks, caffeine, fatty/fried foods, spicy foods, chocolate, citrus juice. Remember that some healthy foods such as avocado, hummus and nuts are also high in the fats that can contribute to the production of acid
- Drink less alcohol, especially before bed
- Wear loose clothing
- Reduce stress
- Lose weight and eat a healthy diet (discuss further with your GP for help)
- Give up smoking (NHS smoking helpline 0800 169 0 169)
- Follow advice from your doctor about medications which help (e.g. Proton pump inhibitors and/or Alginates).

Do not stop taking medicines that have been prescribed for you, discuss with your GP or pharmacist for further advice.

If you have further concerns or questions, please contact the Speech and Language Therapy team on 01284 713303, Monday to Friday 8.30am to 4.30pm.

If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities, please visit the website for AccessAble (formerly DisabledGo) <https://www.accessable.co.uk>



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