

GORD (Gastro-oesophageal reflux disease)

What is GORD?

Heartburn is the main symptom of GORD. You may know this as a burning feeling in your chest. It happens when stomach acid travels up your gullet (oesophagus) and toward your throat (acid reflux). It can be linked to meals, lying down, stooping and straining.

Everyone has acid reflex from time to time. But if it is frequent, you may be experiencing GORD. Self-help steps, medications like antacids, and sometimes surgery can be used to help.

What are the symptoms of acid reflux?

General symptoms:

- heartburn
- too much spit (water brash)
- bringing up acid or bile (acid brash)
- chest or upper stomach pain with bloating.
- discomfort in the centre of your chest (sternum)
- pain when swallowing. This could be an inflamed or narrowed gullet

Throat and lung symptoms:

- hoarseness which lasts longer than 2 weeks (chronic hoarseness)
- wheezing, shortness of breath, and asthma like symptoms
- a cough that lasts longer than 8 weeks (chronic cough)

Less obvious symptoms:

These may be spotted by carers at mealtimes.

- sweating
- refusing food
- crying or distress
- looking more pale
- challenging behaviour
- vomiting or bringing food back up (regurgitation)
- difficulty swallowing or swallowing down the wrong hole (aspiration)

Are there any other conditions linked to GORD?

Up to 1 in 10 cases of chronic cough may be caused by GORD.

In about half the cases where there is chest pain, but an X-ray (angiogram) shows healthy blood flow around the heart, GORD may be the issue. Angina is usually easier to rule out because GORD is not associated with exercise.

Swallowing food the wrong way (aspiration) may cause pneumonia, lung abscess and interstitial lung disease.

Who is at risk of acid reflux?

If you are living with certain conditions or have in the past:

- hiatus hernia
- recent illness
- previous indigestion
- systemic sclerosis disease
- surgery on your stomach or bowel
- increased intra-abdominal pressure
- certain syndromes like Downs Syndrome
- problems with the muscle separating your stomach and gullet

If you put more pressure on the middle area:

- pregnancy
- tight clothes
- obesity or recent weight gain
- being in certain positions like lying down

If you have certain eating, diet, and health habits:

- smoking
- big meals
- slow eating or poor chewing
- alcohol, high fat diet, coffee, acidic or spicy diet

If you have had changes to your mood:

- stress, anxiety or worry

If you are taking medicines:

There is more risk when mixing medicines. But certain medicines have a higher risk:

- SSRIs
- aspirin
- nitrates
- clopidogrel
- anticholinergics
- anti-seizure medicines
- tricyclic antidepressants
- calcium-channel blockers
- anti-inflammatories (not steroid), like ibuprofen, aspirin

Acid reflux in children

Are there any conditions which put my child more at risk of reflux?

- cerebral palsy
- low birth weight
- cow's milk allergy
- hypotonia, floppy muscles
- certain syndromes like Downs or Angelman

What are the symptoms of acid reflux in children?

General symptoms:

- sore throat
- sore tummy
- fluid in their mouth
- chesty or wheezy cough
- blood in poo or sick (vomit)
- may wheeze with more severe reflux

Difficulty with food:

Reflux occurs both in breastfed and in bottle-fed babies.

- refusing food
- poor weight gain
- being sick (vomiting)
- tummy pain after feeding
- slow eating and poor chewing
- bringing food back up (regurgitation)

Symptoms in older babies and children:

- acidic, watery, or bad taste to food
- won't eat because it hurts to swallow
- heartburn and bad tasting watery fluid in their mouth.

GORD can look like baby colic. Symptoms include:

- uncontrolled crying
- more unsettled than normal
- drawing the legs up towards the tummy (foetal position)

More information on GORD in children

<https://patient.info/childrens-health/childhood-gastro-oesophageal-reflux-leaflet>

I think I have GORD. What happens next?

Your doctor may send you to other services to take a closer look at your symptoms. These can include:

- endoscopy
- chest clinic
- trial of treatments
- stop smoking services
- weight management and diet support

Are there any other conditions my doctor might check for?

Yes. These can include:

- weight loss
- issues with posture
- oesophageal spasm
- food or alcohol habits
- medications
- anaemia
- cancer
- helicobacter

Where can I find more information?

<https://patient.info/digestive-health/acid-reflux-and-oesophagitis>

<https://patient.info/news-and-features/diet-sheet-for-oesophageal-reflux>