



Guide to Gastro-Oesophageal Reflux Disease (GORD)

What Is Reflux?

Reflux happens when food or stomach acid travels up into your food pipe (oesophagus), causing:

- A burning feeling in your chest (heartburn)
- A sour taste
- Coughing or throat clearing
- A heavy or bloated stomach

This is common and you can manage it with simple habits.

Why Does Reflux Happen?

At the bottom of your food pipe is a small muscle called the **lower oesophageal sphincter (LOS)**. This muscle should act like a **door** that stays closed to keep acid and food in your stomach.

Reflux can happen when:

- The “door” gets relaxed or weak
- Your stomach has too much pressure (too full, constipated, trousers too tight etc.)
- Food sits in the stomach too long
- Your stress levels are high

Your Gut-Brain Connection

Your brain and stomach talk through a nerve called the **vagus nerve**.

When you're calm → digestion works well.

When you're stressed → digestion slows down.

This is why reflux can flare up on days when you feel worried, overwhelmed, or rushed **even if you eat foods which are usually ok for you.**

Diaphragmatic (Belly) Breathing

(One of the best tools for reflux)

Diaphragmatic breathing tells your body it is safe to digest.

It lowers pressure inside your stomach and helps the LOS “door” stay closed.

How to Do It (Step-by-Step)

Imagine your belly is a balloon that fills up as you breathe in.

1. **Sit comfortably** with your back straight, or lie on your back with your knees bent.
2. **Place one hand on your chest** and **one on your belly**.
3. **Breathe in through your nose for four seconds.**
 - Your belly should rise like a balloon.
 - Your chest should stay mostly still.
4. **Breathe out slowly through your mouth for six seconds.**
 - Your belly falls gently.
5. Repeat for **five to 10 breaths**, especially **before and after meals**.

Doing this several times a day can noticeably reduce reflux symptoms.

Food and Eating Tips

Common trigger foods include:

- Chocolate
- Coffee
- Tomatoes
- Spicy foods
- Peppermint
- Greasy foods
- Alcohol
- Caffeine
- Fizzy drinks

You do **not** need a very strict diet. Just notice what affects you. If it seems that a food is causing your symptoms then it is sensible to try avoiding it for a while to see if symptoms improve.

Eating habits that help:

- **Stop at 80% full** reduces stomach pressure and reduces reflux
- **Eat slowly** this signals to your body that it is safe to digest
- **Sit upright** no lying down, slouching or eating on the run
- **Chew all food to “applesauce” texture** helps to slow eating and allow better digestion
- **Sip liquids** instead of taking large drinks with meals to reduce stomach pressure
- **Eat regular balanced meals** skipping meals or eating tiny portions keeps your body in stress mode. Three balanced meals (with protein, fibre and healthy fats) remind your gut that it's safe to digest
- **Gaviscon advance after meals and before bed** can help by forming a “raft” that floats on top of your stomach contents

Lifestyle Habits That Reduce Reflux

1. Night-Time Habits

If reflux bothers you at night:

- Don't eat for **three hours** before bed
- Don't drink large amounts for **two hours** before bed
- Raise the head of your bed by **10–20 cm** (with books or blocks under the legs of the bed, not extra pillows)

2. Good Posture

Throughout the day:

- Avoid bending forward a lot
- Avoid very tight clothing around your waist or tummy
- Sit tall after meals
- Don't lie down/slouch right after eating

3. Stop Smoking and Vaping

Smoking, vaping, and cannabis all relax the LOS “door” and worsen reflux.

4. Watch your Weight

Reflux can happen at any size. Extra pressure around the stomach may make symptoms stronger in some people.

Bowel Movements and Reflux

Constipation increases pressure inside your body and can trigger reflux.

For healthy bowel movements:

- Drink **1.5 L of water** daily (unless told otherwise)
- Eat fruit or vegetables at each meal
- Walk, stretch, or move each day
- Take your time to poo in the morning
- Chew well, sit down to eat
- Try magnesium-rich foods like leafy greens, oats, pumpkin seeds
- **Eating one to two kiwis a day** they are high in fibre and help your gut move things along more easily. They're gentle on the stomach and work better for many people than other high-fibre foods
- Use a squatty potty (this raises your feet to make it easier to poo/reduce straining)

Mindfulness, Meditation & Hypervigilance

Some people become very aware of every feeling in their tummy, chest or throat.

This is called **hypervigilance** - when the brain becomes extra-sensitive to normal body sensations.

Hypervigilance can make reflux seem worse **whether your reflux is acidic or not**.

Mindfulness, meditation, and breathing reduce this sensitivity by calming the vagus nerve and lowering the body's stress response.

Simple ways to practice:

- Take **two to three belly breaths** before each meal
- Sit down and avoid screens while eating
- Notice the taste, smell, and texture of your food
- Pause halfway through your meal and check your fullness
- Try **three to five minutes** of meditation daily (you do not need to "stop thinking")
- Take short calming breaks during the day

These habits help your brain respond calmly to body sensations, which reduces symptoms.

The Bottom Line

- Reflux isn't just about what you eat.
- It is also about how you breathe, how stressed you feel, how you move and how you eat your meals.
- You might not be able to follow all the advice at once, that's completely okay. Even small changes can help and each one can make a difference in how you feel.
- Try to build new habits step by step, and remember that every positive change, no matter how small, can lead to real improvements in your symptoms over time.