

HASTINGS
INTERNAL MEDICINE

Change your diet and lifestyle to reduce reflux and heartburn

Reflux from the stomach into the esophagus is a common problem and increases the risk of esophageal injury, scarring and in some cases cancer of the esophagus. Reflux may be associated with heartburn symptoms, but also can be completely asymptomatic. There are several strategies that can be used to reduce reflux. If you continue to have problems after making these changes, you may need medication or other medical treatment for your condition.

Try these hints! (by the way, most of these tips also lead to weight loss, and losing weight is one of the best ways to reduce reflux)

1. Eat less at a time; this is especially important if you are older or inactive. Smaller meals put less stress on the stomach and the valve between the esophagus and the stomach.
2. Eat slower and chew your food well; this produces more saliva, which has a protective effect. If you eat slower, you will also tend to eat less food overall.
3. Don't eat greasy, fatty and fried foods. These foods can cause the valve between the stomach and the esophagus to relax, letting caustic stomach acids squirt up into the esophagus, and also delay stomach emptying, prolonging the period of time that stomach acid can back up.
4. Avoid or limit foods that can irritate the esophagus, or schedule small amounts of them for times when you will be upright afterwards. These include chocolate, nuts, mint, citrus juices, tomatoes and tomato products, milk, chili peppers and chili powder.
5. Drink more fluids, including water with meals. This helps lubricate the esophagus, aids digestion and dilutes the acid that leaks through.
6. Reduce or eliminate coffee. Both regular and decaffeinated coffee can irritate the esophagus and stomach, and increase reflux.
7. Avoid drinking more than 1 or 2 servings of soda pop per day. Better yet, eliminate carbonated drinks completely.
8. Don't get upset during or following meals. This can cause the stomach to clench, forcing acid up into the esophagus; it may even retard digestion. Make a rule: no discussion of a disagreeable or stressful subject during a meal. Stressed out at work or home? Meditate. Play. Relax!
9. Avoid doing a lot of bending over for an hour or so after you eat, and don't eat a meal or big snack within 3 hours of going to bed.
10. Loosen up! - Tight waistbands, girdles and any other clothing tight over the abdomen can create pressure and press acid up into the esophagus after eating.
11. Take a 15 minute walk after your meals. Going for a gentle stroll is an excellent "digestive" and has benefits beyond just reducing heartburn, such as improving glucose metabolism, and lowering your risk for heart disease.
12. For nighttime heartburn, consider raising the head of your bed by four to six inches on a pair of bricks, or putting a foam wedge in your bed. This lets gravity help keep stomach contents in the stomach. Some people find that sleeping on their left side helps, too.
13. Stop smoking. Tobacco smoke increases the risk for serious inflammation or ulcers of the stomach and esophagus.