

# Should my infant or child take medicine for reflux?

## What is reflux?

Gastroesophageal reflux or “reflux” is characterized by the movement of stomach contents into the esophagus. This occurs several times a day in healthy infants, children, and adults. Reflux rarely causes symptoms or distress and is usually a messy problem and not a serious problem.

## What are the symptoms?

Reflux may cause troublesome symptoms in some patients. Symptoms are not the same for each child. Common symptoms may include excessive crying, vomiting or “spitting up.” Severe cases may cause wheezing, blood in vomit, or failure to gain weight.

## How is reflux diagnosed?

A physical exam and information about symptoms is enough to diagnose reflux in most infants and older children. Other tests may be done if symptoms are severe to make sure there is not a more serious medical problem.

## How is reflux treated?

- For infants with mild symptoms, treatments such as positioning and smaller and more frequent feedings are helpful. Keeping your baby in an upright position for 30-60 minutes after feedings may also be useful.
- In older children and adolescents, dietary changes such as avoiding fatty or fried foods and avoiding caffeine will help reduce symptoms.
- Severe symptoms need evaluation by a health care provider and may need treatment with medicine or a visit with a specialist called a gastroenterologist.

### MEDICATION

Medication is usually only prescribed in infants and children with severe symptoms. Medications used to treat reflux work by decreasing stomach acid. Your doctor or healthcare professional will work with you to find the right medication, dosage, and schedule for your child.

- Do not stop the medication quickly, as this may cause symptoms to become worse. When it is time to stop taking the medication, the dose is gradually reduced over a period of time.
- Symptoms may become less severe over time even without medication.

- Medications used to decrease acid have side effects such as increasing the chance of having a lung infection or stomach infection.
- Children rarely need to be on a reflux medicine long-term. If you and your provider decide to start a medicine, talk about how long your child should be on it. Discuss when and how you should discontinue the medicine.



### PREVENTION

#### Reducing “spitting up” in infants

Spitting up usually peaks around 4 months old and stops by 12 months old.

Avoid overfeeding:

- Ask your doctor if your baby is taking the right size bottle or nursing the right amount of time.
- Avoid feeding right after your child spits up, wait until the next feeding.

Other suggestions:

- If your child is formula fed, ask your doctor if you should consider changing the formula you use.
- Avoid tight fitting diapers and clothing with elastic waistbands, this places pressure on the stomach.
- Keep infants upright for at least 30 minutes after a feeding.
- Avoid exposure to tobacco smoke.

#### Reducing acid reflux in children 2-12 years old

Reducing acid reflux in children follows the same ideas that we use in adults. Most children are able to decrease their reflux symptoms by making the following changes to their diet and behavior.

- Eat smaller meals more often.
- Avoid eating 2-3 hours before bedtime.
- Elevate the head of the bed by about 30 degrees.
- Avoid carbonated drinks such as soda, caffeine, foods high in fat, fried foods, and foods that contain a lot of acid such as citrus fruit and tomatoes.
- Avoid exposure to tobacco smoke.
- Avoid large meals just before exercise.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

- American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP): Healthy Children.org

# Managing Heartburn in Children and Teens

## Tips for Coping with Heartburn

Changing some daily habits can help reduce or prevent stomach symptoms. Try as many of these ideas as you can to help manage symptoms.

### Eat Healthy

#### AVOID FOODS THAT TRIGGER HEARTBURN

- Alcoholic beverages
- Fried/fatty foods
- Peppermint
- Chocolate
- Coffee (decaffeinated and regular)
- Carbonated drinks, like soda
- Spicy foods

#### EAT SMALL MEALS

Large meals can make your stomach too full and force stomach contents back up into the esophagus. Try eating 4 to 5 small meals during the day instead of one to two large meals.



### Maintain a healthy weight

Extra body weight causes pressure on your stomach which can worsen symptoms.

### Wear loose clothing

Tight-fitting clothes put extra pressure on your stomach and can contribute to your symptoms.

### Sleep for success

#### ELEVATE THE HEAD OF YOUR BED

Try elevating the head of your bed 6-8 inches with blocks and/or sleep on a foam wedge under your body. This will keep you in an upright position as you sleep, and may help to keep stomach acids from backing up.

#### AVOID LYING DOWN DIRECTLY AFTER EATING

Don't lie down within 3 hours of eating. Lying down too soon after eating can cause the acids that are working to digest your food to flow up and cause heartburn. Plan an early dinner if you can.

### Be good to your body

#### AVOID SMOKING OR SECONDHAND SMOKE

Smoking and exposure to secondhand smoke is harmful. Smoking decreases

sphincter pressure, letting stomach acid leak up into your

esophagus. Contact the Vermont Quit Line for help online at [www.vtquitnetwork.org](http://www.vtquitnetwork.org).



#### AVOID ALCOHOL

Alcohol increases stomach waves and contractions, letting stomach acid leak up into your esophagus. For information about underage drinking, visit the Vermont Department of Health at:

[http://healthvermont.gov/adap/underage\\_drinking](http://healthvermont.gov/adap/underage_drinking)

### Pills don't replace skills!

Stress can make your symptoms worse. Like learning how to manage your school or sports schedule, you can learn to manage stress. If you want to try a 10 minute relaxation exercise, visit our website at [www.vtad.org](http://www.vtad.org).

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) teaches people life skills. CBT has been proven helpful for ADHD, migraines, sleep problems, depression, and anxiety. CBT can be done with an individual therapist, in a group, or using self-help books.

- National Association of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy: [www.nacbt.org/whatiscbt.htm](http://www.nacbt.org/whatiscbt.htm)
- VT Center for CBT: (802) 651-8999
- *The Feeling Good Handbook* by David Burns.\*
- *Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life* by Thich Nhat Hanh.\*

\*These are great books, but were not specifically written for children or teens. Browse them in a bookstore first to see if they are right for you.

### Get more information

- American Academy of Pediatrics: <http://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/abdominal/pages/GERD-Reflux.aspx>
- American Academy of Family Physicians: <http://familydoctor.org/familydoctor/en/diseases-conditions/heartburn.html>