

Long COVID: Reflux

Reflux is where acid comes up from your stomach. It can make your throat feel sore which can make swallowing feel uncomfortable. It can also make your voice sound hoarse and cause a persistent cough.



When you eat or drink something, it passes through your food-pipe (oesophagus) into your stomach. Reflux happens when the contents from your stomach (acid and enzymes) travel the wrong way, back up into your food-pipe and sometimes up into your throat (larynx).

Reflux can happen without you being aware of it. Most people experience symptoms of heartburn or indigestion at times e.g. after eating spicy food, after a big meal or lying down after eating. If reflux happens regularly, it can lead to discomfort and worsening symptoms. In many cases, people do not feel reflux in the throat. This is sometimes called silent reflux.

If reflux comes up to the back of the throat it irritates the delicate lining of the throat. This can make it feel sore and may make you feel the need to cough or want to clear your throat. The body will produce mucus to protect this delicate lining so you may feel you have more phlegm to clear. It can also make the muscles tighten, causing a sensation of throat tightness or the sensation of a lump in the throat (globus). Inflammation and/or tightness of the muscles in the throat can also lead to a change in your voice.

Symptoms of reflux:

- Heartburn or indigestion
- Nausea / feeling sick
- Increased mucus in throat
- Excessive throat clearing or dry cough
- Coughing after eating or when lying flat
- Acid coming up into the mouth, or a strange taste in your mouth
- Bad breath
- Feeling of a lump in the throat
- Irritated or sore throat
- Rough or hoarse voice that is worse in the morning
- Reduced stamina of voice

Lifestyle changes can help to reduce the amount of reflux you have. Your GP or doctor may also wish to prescribe medication to help you with managing your reflux.



Ways to help you reduce reflux:



Eat sitting upright, and remain upright for at least an hour after meals



Avoid eating within 3 hours of going to bed



Elevate the head of your bed by 6 inches using a brick or block placed under the mattress



Avoid foods which cause acid reflux: Caffeinated drinks, fizzy drinks, alcohol, high fat products (such as cheese, pastry, chocolate), acidic fluids (such as orange juice, tomatoes, citrus fruits), spicy food



Do not exercise strenuously after food



Bend from the knees rather than from the waist to help keep acid down



Avoid constricting clothing



Trial Gaviscon Advance after meals and before bed



Maintain a healthy weight



Avoid smoking and / or vaping



Reduce stress where possible maintaining a relaxed attitude in your activities

If you are concerned and symptoms persist - consult your GP for treatment.