



Reflux and oesophagitis: a short guide

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What do the words mean?

Reflux is stomach contents coming back up into your food pipe. It can cause heartburn or an acid taste. Oesophagitis is inflammation of the food pipe lining. Reflux symptoms are common, and gastro-oesophageal reflux disease affects about 10-20% of people in Western countries. Reflux is a common cause of oesophagitis, but other causes are possible. Los Angeles grades A to D describe surface damage seen at gastroscopy. They are not cancer stages.

Treatment

Most people improve with the appropriate dose and timing of acid-reducing medicines such as PPIs, which can relieve symptoms and heal reflux oesophagitis. I tailor the medicine plan to your diagnosis and response. Severe oesophagitis may need ongoing treatment and another gastroscopy after healing. A small number of people may need surgery when symptoms or complications persist despite appropriate treatment, or when an anatomical problem is contributing. Smaller meals, avoiding lying down soon after eating and raising the head of the bed may help. Reduce foods that repeatedly trigger your symptoms rather than following a strict blanket diet.

Your next step

A normal gastroscopy does not rule out reflux. If symptoms persist, further assessment may be useful. Barrett's oesophagus is a reflux-associated lining change found in some people, confirmed through tissue examination, and most people with it do not develop cancer. Your recommended follow-up will be documented in your endoscopy report and/or histology report once any tissue results are available.

When to get help

Arrange review for new swallowing difficulty, unexplained weight loss or persistent vomiting. Seek urgent help for food stuck with inability to swallow saliva, vomiting blood or black stools. Call 111 for new severe chest pain, especially with breathlessness, sweating or faintness. Do not assume chest pain is reflux.

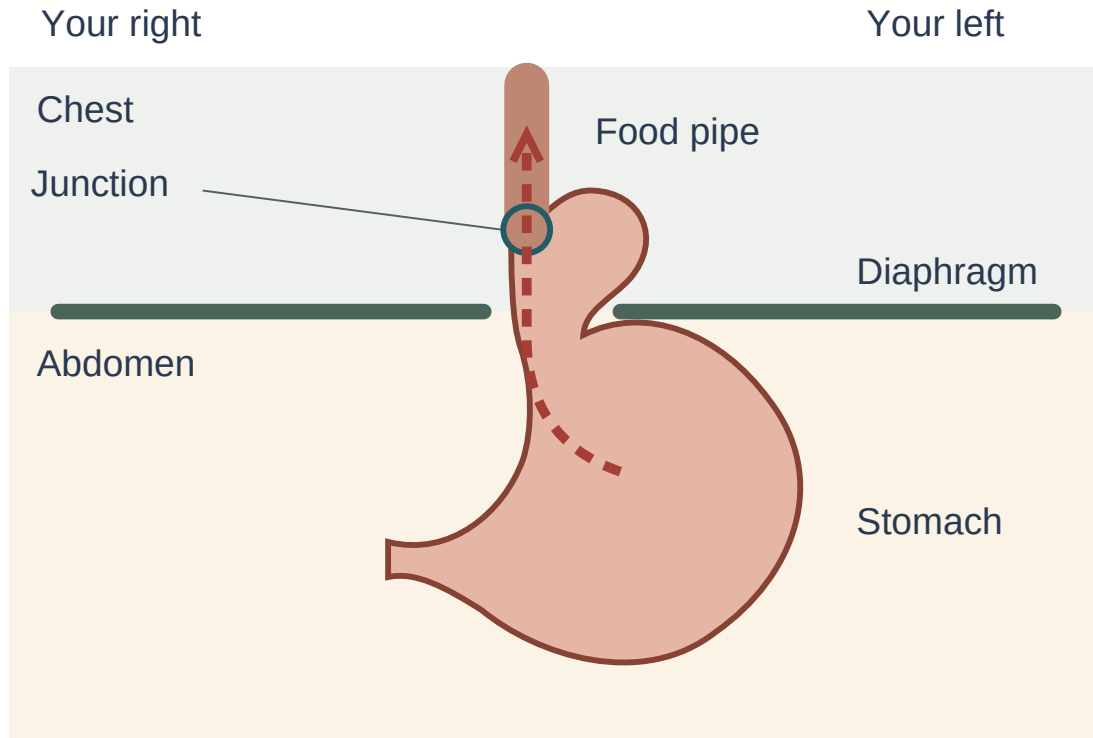
Call 111 for new severe chest pain, especially with breathlessness, sweating or faintness, or if you collapse or are too unwell to travel safely.





How does reflux happen?

Hiatus hernia with reflux



A sliding hiatus hernia moves the junction above the diaphragm. This can weaken the normal barrier and allow stomach contents to move upwards into the food pipe. The animation shows one possible pattern; a hernia does not always cause symptoms or reflux.

Read this illustration alongside the advice in this guide.

