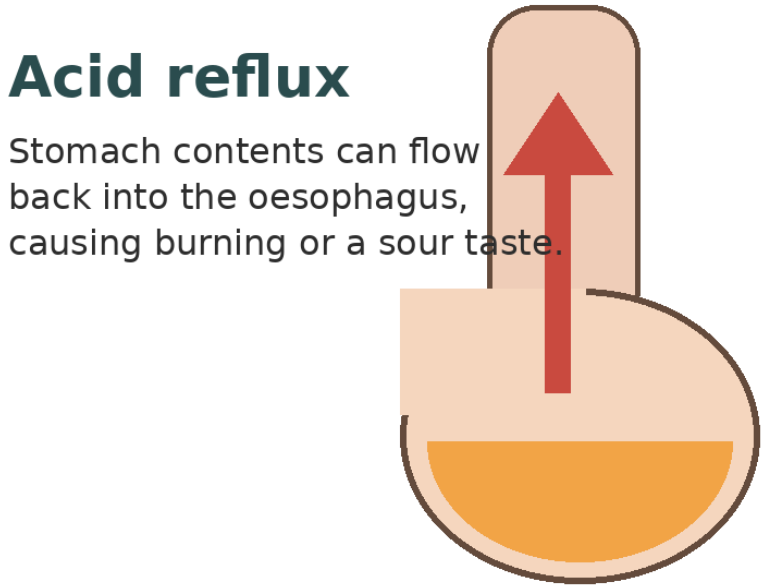
SHAMINDRA DIREKZE
GASTROENTEROLOGIST & HEPATOLOGIST

Reflux (Heartburn / GORD)

A practical guide to controlling symptoms



What is reflux?

Reflux happens when stomach contents travel back up into the oesophagus (food pipe). This can cause heartburn, a sour or acidic taste, regurgitation, belching, throat irritation, cough or hoarseness. Symptoms are often worse after meals, when bending, or when lying down.

Good to know

Reflux is common and is often manageable with a combination of practical changes and medicines. Treatment should be tailored to how often symptoms occur and whether there are any warning features.

SHAMINDRA DIREKZE
GASTROENTEROLOGIST & HEPATOLOGIST

Practical ways to reduce symptoms

Meals
Try smaller meals rather than very large meals. Avoid eating for at least 3 hours before bed.

Your triggers
Only restrict foods or drinks that clearly trigger your symptoms. Common triggers can include alcohol, coffee/caffeine, chocolate, fatty foods, spicy foods, tomatoes and acidic drinks.

Weight
If you are above your healthy weight, gradual weight loss can reduce reflux.

Smoking
Stopping smoking can improve reflux as well as overall health.

Clothing & posture
Avoid tight clothing around the waist. Symptoms may worsen with bending or lying flat soon after eating.

Night symptoms
Raise the head end of the bed by about 10–20 cm using blocks or a wedge. Extra pillows alone may increase abdominal pressure and are less helpful.

Medicines for reflux

Medicines can be very effective, but the right choice depends on the frequency and severity of symptoms, other medicines you take, pregnancy, and your medical history. Ask a pharmacist or doctor if you are unsure.

Antacids
Examples available in Ireland include Rennie (for example Rennie Peppermint or Rennie Sugar Free) and Gaviscon products that also contain antacid ingredients. Antacids neutralise stomach acid and can give fairly quick, short-term relief. They are useful for occasional symptoms, but frequent continuous use is not a good long-term strategy.

Alginates
A commonly available Irish brand is Gaviscon, including Gaviscon Advance oral suspension or chewable tablets and Gaviscon Peppermint chewable tablets. Alginate-containing products form a floating protective 'raft' over stomach contents and can be particularly useful for reflux after meals or at night. Follow the product instructions; some formulations are taken after meals and at bedtime.

SHAMINDRA DIREKZE
GASTROENTEROLOGIST & HEPATOLOGIST

Proton pump inhibitors (PPIs)

Examples include omeprazole, esomeprazole, pantoprazole and lansoprazole. Pharmacy brands available in Ireland include Losec Control (omeprazole) and Nexium Control (esomeprazole). Prescription PPIs are also widely supplied under generic and other brand names. PPIs reduce acid production and are the main treatment for frequent GORD. A typical initial course is 4-8 weeks. Follow your prescription or packet instructions; many PPIs work best when taken before food.

H2-receptor antagonists

Famotidine is an H2-receptor antagonist. Irish pharmacy brands include Pepcid AC 10 mg (famotidine) and Pepcid Duo (famotidine combined with magnesium hydroxide and calcium carbonate). These medicines reduce acid production and may be useful for short-term symptoms when appropriate. Ask your pharmacist or doctor whether they are suitable for you, particularly if you have kidney problems or take other medicines.

Important medication points

- Do not stop prescribed medicines without discussing this with your doctor or pharmacist.
- Antacids can interfere with absorption of some other medicines, so they may need to be separated by a few hours.
- If you use a PPI long term, it should be reviewed periodically. When appropriate, the aim is the lowest effective dose; some people can step down to ‘as-needed’ treatment.
- Reflux can temporarily flare when a long-term PPI is reduced or stopped (“rebound acid”). A gradual step-down and short-term alginate/antacid use may help.
- Anti-inflammatory painkillers such as ibuprofen can aggravate indigestion/reflux in some people. Ask for advice if you use them regularly.

When should I seek medical advice?

Arrange a GP review

If reflux occurs most days for 3 weeks or more, keeps returning, is getting worse, or is not improving despite appropriate lifestyle measures and over-the-counter treatment. A doctor may review your medicines, prescribe treatment, test for other causes or arrange a gastroscopy if needed.

Seek prompt medical assessment if you have:

- Difficulty or pain when swallowing, or food sticking
- Unexplained weight loss
- Persistent or repeated vomiting
- Vomiting blood or black, tarry stools
- New or persistent upper abdominal pain
- Symptoms that are unusual for you or rapidly worsening

SHAMINDRA DIREKZE
GASTROENTEROLOGIST & HEPATOLOGIST

Chest pain can be an emergency

Do not assume new, severe or unexplained chest pain is reflux. Seek urgent medical help, particularly if pain is heavy/tight, occurs with exertion, or is associated with breathlessness, sweating, nausea, dizziness, or pain spreading to the arm, jaw, back or shoulder.

A simple symptom plan

1	**Notice the pattern**	Keep track of when symptoms occur: after particular meals, alcohol/caffeine, late eating, bending or lying down.
2	**Make targeted changes**	Use the practical measures above rather than unnecessarily avoiding many foods.
3	**Use medicines appropriately**	Occasional symptoms may respond to an alginate or antacid. Frequent symptoms often need a PPI course after discussion with a pharmacist or doctor.
4	**Review**	If symptoms persist, recur quickly after treatment, or you need regular medication, arrange a clinical review.

Sources used for this patient sheet: HSE patient information; HSE Medicines Management Programme guidance; NICE CG184; and current Irish medicine listings/product information from HPRA and medicines.ie (checked September 2026).

SHAMINDRA DIREKZE
GASTROENTEROLOGIST & HEPATOLOGIST

This leaflet provides general information and does not replace individual medical or dietetic advice.

For more information, scan the QR code below to visit our website: