



Acid Reflux in Pregnancy

What is acid reflux?

Acid reflux is when the acid that is normally in your stomach backs up into your esophagus. The esophagus is the tube that carries food from your mouth to your stomach. Another term for acid reflux is “gastroesophageal reflux disease,” or GERD. Many women get acid reflux during pregnancy. Acid reflux usually gets worse over the course of the pregnancy. It usually goes away after the baby is born. Women who have acid reflux in one pregnancy are likely to get it again in future pregnancies.

What are the symptoms of acid reflux during pregnancy?

The most common symptoms of acid reflux during pregnancy are:

- Burning in the chest, known as heartburn
- Burning in the throat or an acid taste in the mouth
- Stomach or chest pain
- Nausea or vomiting
- Trouble swallowing
- A raspy voice or sore throat
- A cough

What can I do on my own to improve my symptoms?

- Eat 4 to 6 small meals a day, instead of 3 large ones.
- Avoid lying down within 3 hours of eating.
- Avoid eating within 3 hours of bedtime.
- Avoid wearing tight-fitting clothes.
- Avoid foods that make your symptoms worse. Foods that commonly make acid reflux worse are coffee, cola, tea, citrus foods, chocolate, and fatty foods.
- Raise the head of your bed by 6 to 8 inches (15 to 20 cm). You can do this by putting blocks of wood under 2 legs of the bed or using a Styrofoam wedge under your pillow.

What medicines are available?

There are 3 main types of medicines that can reduce acid reflux symptoms. They are:

- Antacids (i.e. Tums)
- Histamine blockers (i.e. Zantac or Pepcid)
- Proton pump inhibitors (i.e. Prevacid or Prilosec)

Usually, we recommend that pregnant women first try antacids to reduce their symptoms. You can buy antacids without a prescription. If antacids don't help enough, then recommend that you try a histamine blocker. These medicines work better than antacids to reduce symptoms. You can buy most histamine blockers without a prescription.

When should I call my doctor or nurse?

Call your doctor or nurse if you:

- Have severe heartburn or chest pain, or these symptoms don't get better with treatment
- Have a fever, headache, nausea, or vomiting with your heartburn
- Choke when you eat, have trouble swallowing, or feel like food is getting "stuck" on the way down your throat
- Lose weight without trying
- Vomit bright red blood or material that looks like coffee grounds
- Have bowel movements that look like black tar

Reference: Uptodate. "Patient Information: Acid Reflux in Pregnancy (The Basics)" Available at www.uptodate.org