

Treatment Of Acid Reflux Symptoms

First-line treatment in managing Acid Reflux symptoms is to change the food and lifestyle. That will take care of the acid reflux problem in most cases. The medications should be used only as a temporary measure (at the most for 12 weeks, preferably two weeks). When taken long term (more than 12 weeks), the acid-lowering drugs can cause several harmful side effects as outlined below.

Finally, only a tiny percentage of patients may require surgery for acid reflux problems. Surgery may be required rarely to fix hiatal hernia (a defect in the diaphragm) or laxity of the sphincter muscle at the lower end of the food pipe. Surgery is done as the last resort when all other treatment measures fail.

Food and Lifestyle interventions for managing Acid Reflux disease:

- 1. *Modify the Diet.***
- 2. *Modify the lifestyle.***
- 3. *Eliminate obesity and aim for healthy weight.***
- 4. *Sleep with the upper half of the body elevated.***
- 5. *Sleep on the left side.***
- 6. *Stress Management.***
- 7. *Herbal remedies.***
- 8. *Finally, a short term course of acid-lowering medications***

(Note: The above strategies are the first-line management in Acid Reflux disease. The prescription drugs for acid-lowering have significant side effects, and current medical recommendations limit the use of these drugs to no more than 12 weeks).

- 1. *Dietary Modification*** - Avoid consuming following food and beverages which increase the acid production in the stomach, specifically at dinner time:
 - Tomato sauces and tomato-based gravy foods including pizzas, and pasta.
 - Vegetables and lentils cooked in onion and garlic-based gravies.

- Greasy foods rich in saturated animal fats (meat and dairy products specifically cheeses and paneer, and milk-based sweets)
- Fried foods and food preparations cooked in refined oils—Only use the cold compressed natural oils such as sesame, mustard, and coconut oil in cooking. Ghee (purified butter) improves digestive health and boosts immunity. Sixty percent of immune cells of the body lies in the intestinal wall. Hippocrates (father of Allopathic medicine), and Ayurveda (the science of life from ancient India) both declared over 3000 years ago that “ All diseases begin in guts.” Modern science is beginning to realize that ancient wisdom.
- Eliminate packaged foods and baked goods --Most of these foods are prepared in refined palm oil to prolong the shelf life. Of all the refined cooking oils, Palm oil provides the most extended shelf life for the cooked food products. The Palm oil, the most commonly used cooking oil by the Indian commercial food industry, remains banned for cooking in the USA and European nations.
- Citrus fruits and fruit juices-- The orange juice and packaged juices are acidic. Citric acid, sugar, and preservatives commonly added to packaged juices to prolong the shelf life make these preparations highly acidic.
- Carbonated drinks and Sodas- Carbon dioxide released from carbonated drinks increase stomach pressure. Additionally, carbonated beverages, including soda, are acidic.
- Caffeinated drinks-- The Indian style chai rich in milk and tea leaves overcooked by prolonged boiling becomes acidic from the milk, and tannic acid liberated from tea leaves. Coffee made with overroasted coffee beans and whole fat milk or cream similarly is acidic. To keep the stomach happy, drink light brewed tea and coffee, which are more soothing to the stomach and less acidic. Do not consume caffeinated drinks after 5 PM.
- Avoid spicy and stale food- The spices which are irritants to the stomach are the store-bought powdered garam masala, red chilies, and spice powders. If you like garam masala use it whole or use it freshly ground. Grind your spices such as cumin, coriander, and black pepper fresh at home.
- Chocolate in different forms.
- Alcoholic beverages

Be familiar with acidic versus alkaline foods:



2. **Modify Lifestyle**-The lifestyle changes that help in minimizing acid reflux include:

- **Eating smaller sized meals** -Big meals which over distend the stomach increases the likelihood of backflow of the acidic food into the food pipe.

- ***Eat slowly chewing the food properly to enhance saliva secretion in the mouth-*** The alkaline saliva minimizes the acidity.
 - ***Eat dinner three hours before sleep time-*** Eat at least three hours before lying down to sleep. When one is standing and sitting, the gravity keeps the food down in the stomach and prevents the backflow of stomach contents up into the food pipe.
 - ***Do not bend or exercise for 2-3 hours after eating a meal*** -The exercise and bending over increases intraabdominal pressure making the acid reflux more likely. Walking 500-1000 steps after the dinner meal enhance stomach emptying and help minimize reflux.
 - ***Sleep on an incline with the head of the bed elevated by 6-8 inches*** - For the head elevation, put 6 to 8-inch wood blocks under the bedpost at the head end or place a triangular foam pad under the chest and upper body. The upward head incline helps build gravity to keep the stomach contents down.
 - ***Avoid tight clothing*** – Tight pants, jeans, blouses, and similar outfits increase the intraabdominal pressure making acid reflux more likely.
3. **Lose weight** - Overweight and obesity, especially abdominal obesity, is a significant risk factor for acid reflux disease. Obesity increases intraabdominal pressure, increases the risk of hiatal hernia, both of which aggravate the reflux. Losing 10-15% body weight or preferably 4-6 inches on waistline will help considerably.

(Note: Review the section of Obesity: Natural fix on the website www.foodlifestylebalance.com)

4. **Quit smoking** - Nicotine relaxes the barrier muscle at the lower end of food, aggravating the reflux of acid foods from the stomach.
5. **Strengthen the diaphragm muscle**—A robust diaphragmatic muscle strengthens and supports the muscular ring at the lower end of the food pipe. The weak diaphragm muscle, on the other hand, as seen in obesity, can increase acid reflux from either the laxity of the muscular ring or hiatal hernia or both. An excellent way to strengthen the diaphragm muscle is Pranayam

Kriyas, such as Kapalbhati, Deep breathing and Om Chanting, Bhastrika and Ujjayi.