

Gastro-oesophageal reflux in babies

Information for children, families and carers

We have written this factsheet to give you information about gastro-oesophageal reflux in babies. It explains what gastro-oesophageal reflux is, the signs to look out for and how it is treated. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact us using the details at the end of this factsheet.

What is gastro-oesophageal reflux?

Gastro-oesophageal reflux is a common condition where acid from the stomach travels up into the food pipe (oesophagus) and mouth, causing an uncomfortable burning sensation.

What causes gastro-oesophageal reflux?

Normally when food is eaten, it travels down the food pipe into the stomach, where it is then broken down by acids. After the food has been partially broken down, it passes through to the small and large intestines to be digested.

Gastro-oesophageal reflux is caused by a weakened sphincter (a small band of muscle between the food pipe and the stomach opening). Normally when food is about to enter the stomach, the sphincter relaxes (opens) and then tightens up (closes), acting as a valve to stop food from travelling back up the food pipe. However, if a baby's sphincter is weak and unable to close properly, stomach acid and partially broken down food is able to pass back up into the food pipe, causing the symptoms of gastro-oesophageal reflux.

Gastro-oesophageal reflux is more common in babies, especially small or premature babies, because their sphincter is not fully developed.

What are the signs and symptoms?

If your baby has gastro-oesophageal reflux, they may:

- bring milk back up with burping
- vomit excessively (with no clear pattern in terms of timing or amount)
- fuss, cry and be restless

- refuse to feed and 'fight' the nipple or teat
- manage small quantities of feed only
- arch their back when being fed
- choke or gag
- struggle to gain weight

How is it treated?

Babies with mild gastro-oesophageal reflux will not usually need any treatment. This is because symptoms tend to improve as babies are weaned onto solid foods. However, babies with more severe gastro-oesophageal reflux may need medication, such as feed thickeners, to ease their symptoms. Feed thickeners help to solidify milk once it is in the stomach, which makes it harder to bring back up.

Gaviscon is a type of feed thickener and works in two ways:

- it contains substances that neutralise the acid in the stomach
- it floats on the surface of the stomach contents, helping to prevent backflow into the food pipe

How to make the Gaviscon solution

1. Before you start, ensure the work surface in your kitchen is clean and dry.
2. Wash your hands with soap and water.
3. Each 'dual sachet' consists of two half sachets.
4. Mix six half sachets with 30ml of cooled, boiled water in a sterilised bottle (this is the total daily amount you will give your baby).
5. Label the bottle with the date and time you made the solution.
6. Store the bottle of Gaviscon solution in the fridge for a maximum of one day (24 hours).

How to give your baby the Gaviscon solution if breastfeeding

You will need to give your baby 5ml of the pre-made Gaviscon solution after, or towards the end of, every feed (up to six times a day). To do this, follow the steps below:

1. With a clean syringe, take 5ml from your bottle of pre-made Gaviscon solution and put the rest back in the fridge for later.
2. Hold your baby in an upright position.
3. Slowly squeeze a small amount of the solution from the syringe into the side of your baby's gums or cheek.
4. Allow your baby time to swallow this before giving any more.
5. Continue to do this until you have given your baby the full 5ml.

How to give your baby the Gaviscon solution if bottle feeding

You will need to give your baby 0.5ml of the pre-made Gaviscon solution for every 10ml of milk that your baby usually takes. To do this, follow the steps below:

1. With a clean syringe, take 0.5ml from your bottle of pre-made Gaviscon solution for every 10ml of milk that your baby usually takes. For example, if your baby takes a 50ml bottle of milk, you will need to give your baby 2.5ml of Gaviscon solution (0.5ml x 5). Put the rest back in the fridge for later.
2. In a separate bottle, mix together the milk and the Gaviscon solution.
3. Bottle feed your baby as normal.

Other ways you can help ease your baby's symptoms

You can also help ease your baby's symptoms by:

- changing their nappy before feeding them (this can reduce their chance of vomiting)
- feeding your baby with slightly smaller volumes of milk on a more regular basis
- burping them more frequently
- holding them upright for as long as you can after a feed
- making the head end of their cot slightly higher (for example by standing it on something stable), so that their head is slightly raised (**never put anything directly under your baby's head, and never use a pillow with a baby under 12 months old**)

Contact us

Please contact us or your general practitioner (GP) if you:

- have any problems with making or giving your baby the Gaviscon solution
- are concerned your baby's reflux symptoms are not improving or are getting worse

Neonatal community outreach team (NCOT)

Telephone: **07766 994816** (Monday to Saturday, 7.30am to 4.30pm)

Woodland ward (special care baby unit)

Telephone: **023 8120 6553** (out of hours)

Useful links

www.nhs.uk/conditions/reflux-in-babies

www.bliss.org.uk/parents/about-your-baby/medical-conditions/reflux

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For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit **www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport**

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