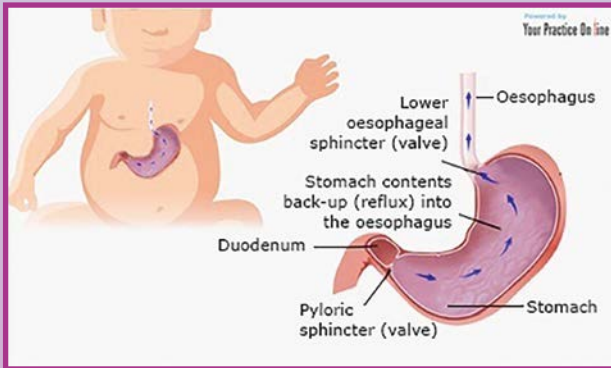


## BACKGROUND

Gastro-oesophageal reflux (GOR), and gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD) are related, but different.

### *GOR is normal, GORD is a disease.*

**GOR** (,reflux') refers to the passage of contents from the stomach into the oesophagus. The refluxed material may enter the throat or mouth; in infants, it often is ejected from the mouth, sometimes forcefully. Reflux is a normal occurrence in individuals of all ages, especially during and immediately after meals. Reflux is usually normal if it is associated with few, mild infrequent symptoms, or none at all, and the infant is growing and developing normally.



In contrast, **GORD** is present when reflux causes symptoms that are troublesome, severe, or of longstanding; and/or if reflux causes a complication. These symptoms include recurrent forceful vomiting, vomiting of blood, chronic cough, chronic irritability, or poor weight gain. These symptoms might indicate that reflux is severe enough to be causing a complication, e.g. inflammation of the oesophagus, known as, 'oesophagitis'. If GORD is suspected, tests and / or treatment are likely required.

This leaflet focuses on GOR and GORD *in infants, i.e. age 12 months and under.*

# Living with Reflux

Raising awareness of Gastro-oesophageal Reflux

Providing support and information to families living with Gastro-oesophageal Reflux

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON REFLUX IN CHILDREN, VISIT:

[f / livingwithreflux](#)

[/ livingwithreflux.org](#)

[@LWReflux](#)

[H / healthunlocked.com /living-with-reflux](#)

Parents Guide to Gastro-Oesophageal Reflux (GOR) and Reflux Disease (GORD) in Infants (i.e. 12 months of age or younger). Please also see the Living with Reflux leaflet: **'Symptoms in Infants: Is the cause Food Allergy or Reflux Disease (GORD)?'** The material set out in this leaflet is provided for information only and does not replace or substitute for a professional medical opinion. If you have any concerns regarding the health of a child, you should seek advice from a qualified medical professional.

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# Living with Reflux

Raising awareness of Gastro-oesophageal Reflux

## PARENTS GUIDE TO

Gastro-Oesophageal Reflux (GOR) and Reflux Disease (GORD) in Infants (ie, 12 months of age or younger)

### Living with Reflux Charity Guides



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## INFANTS

In the first several months of life, infants take in huge volumes of feeds relative to their body weight. This is because they are growing and developing rapidly and require a much higher caloric intake per kg body weight than older children or adults. The infant stomach has a limited capacity to stretch to accommodate these volumes, and the oesophagus in infants is relatively short, making it easy for stomach contents to overflow into the oesophagus and out of the mouth. This is often referred to as infant regurgitation, spitting up, possetting, spilling or vomiting. This is usually effortless, but on occasion can be forceful. The peak age for regurgitation is between 3 and 7 months; during this period, up to 70% of otherwise healthy, happy, thriving infants regurgitate a few times a day. The tendency to regurgitate gradually decreases, so that by age 12-15 months, only about 5% of infants continue to regurgitate. Ongoing regurgitation past the age of 18-24 months is considered abnormal.

**IN OTHER WORDS, in the large majority of infants, regurgitation/spitting up is a normal occurrence that they will outgrow with time, the introduction of solid foods, and assuming the upright position, i.e. walking. When such infants are thriving and generally happy, it's evident that this is GOR, i.e. physiologic reflux, i.e. normal.**

Other symptoms common in infants are excessive crying and/or fussiness, and/or arching of the back. These can give the impression that the infant is in discomfort. These symptoms are distressing to caregivers. The symptoms may or may not indicate an underlying medical problem. Because the infant may also be regurgitating or spitting up, it is often assumed that the unexplained crying or apparent discomfort is due to the regurgitation, that GORD (reflux disease) is present, and that medication is required. However, infants have a limited range of symptoms that occur in response to different stimuli, the commonest symptoms being irritability or unexplained crying, and these symptoms are not specific to GORD.

**Moreover, there are other more common causes of these symptoms than GORD. These include:**

- Constipation
- 'Colic' or excessive unexplained crying may be due to difficulty 'changing state' - in other words, once some infants start crying for any reason, their immature nervous system makes it hard for them to change from that 'state' to another, i.e. a calm state. This inability of infants to self-calm is a normal maturational issue, and unexplained crying due to this cause usually resolves by 3-5 months of age

- Gassiness. Breast milk contains a lot of the sugar lactose, and this sugar cannot all be digested in the small intestine, so a lot of it reaches the large bowel where it is converted to gas, and may cause cramping. Infants are not used to this sensation, and this may be a cause of crying
- Air swallowing. If the infant is struggling to suck from the bottle, a lot of air can be swallowed during feeding, causing stomach distension, discomfort, and difficulty burping
- Allergy or sensitivity to foods. Most commonly, the offending allergen is cow or soy milk protein in infant formula, or in the breastfeeding mother's diet that crosses in breastmilk. There are other less common dietary allergies or sensitivities. See also our Living with Reflux leaflet on Food Allergy and Sensitivity in Infants
- Exposure to tobacco smoke
- Infection

**IN SUMMARY:** Regurgitation or spitting up is common and normal in most otherwise healthy, thriving, happy infants. Irritability or excessive crying is also a common symptom in such infants in the first few months of life. The presence of both symptoms does not necessarily mean that the regurgitation is the cause of crying, or that GORD is present. Of all the infants who regurgitate, with or without irritability, very few have GORD.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

If you have any concerns you should always speak with your doctor as soon as possible. If your infant has any of the following 'red flag' or warning signs, you should seek medical attention promptly:

### **,RED-FLAG' or warning signs for which you should seek medical attention**

- Vomiting bile (green material)
- Repeated projectile (forceful) vomiting
- Crying that does not stop
- Vomiting blood
- Abdominal swelling or distension
- Severe constipation
- Stools that are bloody or jet-black
- Persistent refusal of feeds
- Lethargy
- Fever



- Weight loss or poor weight gain
- Excessive crying or irritability during or after feeding or regurgitation
- Vomiting old food, i.e. several hours after feeding
- Choking or blue spells
- Chronic vomiting that starts after 6 months of age

## WHAT CAN YOU DO TO ALLEVIATE SYMPTOMS?

In an infant with repeated regurgitation that is distressing to them or you, assuming no 'red-flag' or warning signs are present, some of the following may help, recognising that improvement may take 2-3 weeks to occur:

- Avoid exposure to smoke (tobacco/other) - it causes irritability
- Avoid over-feeding - ask your medical professional about appropriate sized bottles, teats or nursing routines
- Burp (wind) your baby frequently before, during and after feeding
- Avoid the use of car seats immediately after feeding
- Avoid clothing or nappies that are tight around the abdomen
- In line with current NHS guidelines on sudden infant death syndrome, infants should be placed on their back to sleep. Under current guidelines, sleeping and positional management of reflux is no longer advised. For further details, check the latest NHS guidance on sudden infant death syndrome.

## WHAT YOUR DOCTOR MAY ADVISE

- Time-limited removal of certain foods from your diet if you are breastfeeding; specifically, cow's milk, soy milk, eggs, shellfish, caffeine, chocolate. \*
- Thickened feeds
- A trial of hypoallergenic formula
- Referral to a paediatrician or a paediatric gastroenterologist
- Further tests
- Treatment with medication: remember, these medications are not without potential side-effects, immediate or late

\* Because exclusion of milk from your diet, or of cow or soy milk from your infant's diet can compromise nutritional status and require supplements, this should be done under the supervision of a doctor or dietician.