

Alliance ENT & Hearing Center

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Recommendations

Your Voice and Acid Reflux

What is Acid reflux?

By definition, acid reflux is the backflow of stomach acid into the esophagus, which is the tube that carries food from the throat to the stomach. The lower part of the esophagus has a specialized muscle around it that usually stays tightly closed, opening only to allow food and liquid into the stomach. Acid reflux occurs when this lower esophageal sphincter (LES) relaxes more often than it should or at inappropriate times, allowing stomach acid to splash up into the esophagus. Symptoms of acid reflux include heartburn, chest discomfort, and a bitter taste in the mouth, caused by stomach acid flowing up into the mouth. Acid reflux can also affect your voice. Reflux of the stomach acid may burn the back (posterior) portion of the larynx (or voice box) causing swelling or ulceration of the vocal folds. Symptoms of damage to the posterior portion of the larynx include chronic hoarseness, voice fatigue, cough, a sensation of a lump in the throat, and/or a feeling of choking.

What foods should be avoided if I have acid reflux?

Certain foods are more likely than others to trigger acid reflux. The following foods weaken the muscle valve of the lower esophageal sphincter, aggravate acid reflux, and **should be avoided.**

- Fatty or fried foods-these foods stay in the stomach longer
- Peppermint and spearmint
- Whole milk
- Animal and Vegetable oils
- Chocolate
- Creamed foods or soups
- Citrus fruits (oranges and grapefruit)
- Pineapple
- Tomatoes

Certain beverages also have a relaxation effect on the lower esophageal sphincter and promote acid reflux. The following beverages **should be avoided:**

- Citrus juices
- Coffee (regular* and decaffeinated**)
- Tea (caffeinated*)
- Caffeinated soft drinks*
- Carbonated beverages
- Alcohol

*In addition to aggravating acid reflux, alcohol and caffeine can also affect your voice. Alcohol can cause the drying of the mucous membrane on the vocal folds; caffeine decreases secretions in the larynx also causing dehydration of the vocal folds. This dehydration results in the lack of optimum performance of the vocal in producing voice.

**Decaffeinated coffee contains enzymes that aggravate acid reflux.

How else can I control acid reflux?

Improving your eating habits can also reduce reflux.

- Try to eat small frequent meals instead of three big meals a day. Large meals stay in the stomach longer, stimulate the stomach to secrete more acids for digestion, and increase the likelihood of upward pressure against the lower esophageal sphincter. By eating small meals, the stomach has less of a workload and requires less acid secretion for the digestive process.
- After eating, keep an upright posture. **Do not** lie down immediately after eating. By lying in a horizontal position right after eating, stomach acid pools in your throat and burns the back portion of your larynx where the vocal folds are located.
- Eat meals at least 3 to 4 hours before going to bed. Avoid bedtime snacks.
- Stop using tobacco in all forms. Nicotine weakens the lower esophageal muscle.
- Avoid chewing gum and hard candy. They increase the amount of swallowed air, which in turn, leads to belching and reflux.
- Drink at least 48 to 64 ounces of water per day.

Why should I increase my water intake?

Internal hydration is an important component to maintaining the health of your vocal folds. For the vocal folds to function normally they must be well lubricated. Although water that is swallowed does not touch the vocal folds, glands that lie in the vocal folds provide lubrication. The whole body must be well hydrated, otherwise the fluid secreted by these glands will consist of a sticky mucous, which will cover

the vocal folds and interfere with their vibration. Therefore, keeping your body well hydrated will result in lubricating the vocal folds, which often leads directly to an improved voice quality.

Cheat-sheet for recommended diet

FOOD GROUPS

GROUP	RECOMMENDED	AVOID
Milk or Milk Products	Skim, 1% or 2% low-fat milk; low-fat or fat free yogurt	Whole milk (4%), chocolate milk
Vegetables	All other vegetables	Fried or creamy style vegetables, tomatoes
Fruits	Apple, berries, melons, bananas, peaches, pears	Citrus: such as oranges, grapefruit, pineapple
Breads and Grains	All those made with low-fat content	Any prepared with whole milk or high-fat
Meat, meat substitutes	Low-fat meat, chicken, fish, turkey	Cold cuts, sausage, bacon, fatty meat, chicken fat/skin
Fat, oils	None or small amounts	All animal or vegetable oils
Sweets and Desserts	All made with no or low fat (less than or equal to 3 grams fat/serving)	Chocolate, desserts made with oils and/or fats
Beverages	Decaffeinated, non-mint herbal tea; juices (except citrus); water	Alcohol, coffee (regular or decaffeinated), carbonated beverages
Soups	Fat-free or low –fat based	Cream-based soups