

Reflux in Infants



Babies normally spit up because of their immature and weak esophageal sphincter muscles. Gastroesophageal reflux happens when irritating stomach acids are regurgitated up into the esophagus, causing pain similar to heartburn. Most babies outgrow reflux by 12 months of age.

Symptoms of reflux that require medical attention include:

- Vomiting
- Spitting up
- Failure to thrive
- Irritability
- Difficult feeding

For babies with reflux, try the following techniques to decrease spitting up:

- Feed baby at a 40-degree angle (head up)
- Burp baby frequently
- Feed baby less at one time, but more frequently, and avoid "topping off" if baby is bottle fed
- Keep baby in an upright position for at least 20 minutes after eating
- Changing formulas does not necessary prevent or minimize reflux, unless baby is lactose intolerant or has a cow's milk intolerance
- Speak with you health care professional before making changes in formula
- In breast-fed babies, maternal diet modification may help; try eliminating lactose, caffeine, garlic, or gassy foods

Thickening the formula with rice cereal is sometimes helpful in reducing incidence of spit-up. Some formulas, such as Similac® Sensitive R.S.™, are specially designed with rice starch to reduce frequent spit-up.

In severe cases of reflux, medication may be needed. Medication used includes H2-receptor antagonists (H2 blockers) or proton pump inhibitors (PPIs).

References

Committee on Nutrition, American Academy of Pediatrics. In: Kleinman RE, ed. Pediatric Nutrition Handbook. 4th ed. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 1998.

National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse (NDDIC). Gastroesophageal reflux in infants. Available at: <http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/ddiseases/pubs/gerdinfant/index.htm>. Accessed December 15, 2007.