

A speech bubble icon with a rainbow gradient border and a dark blue interior. The text "Patient Information" is written in white, bold, sans-serif font inside the bubble.

**Patient
Information**

Gastro-oesophageal reflux in infants: a parent's guide

Reflux is very common in normal, healthy infants, but it can be worrying for parents. This leaflet explains what reflux is, ideas for how best to manage it and when to seek further help.



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What is reflux?

Babies often bring up milk during or shortly after feeding – this is known as 'possetting', or 'reflux'

It is different to vomiting, where the baby's muscles forcefully contract to make the baby sick. Reflux is just your baby passively "spitting up" whatever they have just swallowed.

However, it can still be upsetting, and it's natural to be worried that something is wrong.

It is important know that reflux is normal, and usually just the result of a baby's oesophagus (food pipe) developing.

Most babies will outgrow reflux by around 6-months of age, and it usually stops altogether when the baby reaches 12-14 months of age, when the ring of muscle at the bottom of their oesophagus fully develops and closes off, preventing the stomach contents from leaking out. It's unusual for reflux to continue past 18 months.



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Only in a small number of cases can reflux be a sign of a more serious problem, such as gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD). Gastro-oesophageal Reflux (GORD) is when there are symptoms or signs that are troublesome. Please see the NHS website for more information on this.¹

What can I try to help my baby's reflux?

- Wind (burp) your baby regularly throughout their feeds.
- Avoid overfeeding your baby – don't force them to take more milk than they want, some babies prefer to feed little and often.
- If bottle feeding, check that the hole in your baby's teat is not too large. Giving milk too quickly can cause regurgitation. Slow or medium flow teats are the best choice (size 1 or 2).
- Keep your baby upright for at least 20-30 minutes after feeding
- Avoid putting your baby in a car seat immediately after feeds

¹ <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/reflux-in-babies/>



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- Avoid tight fitting clothing or nappies around the tummy
- If you need to change baby's nappy after a feed place a cushion underneath their head so they are not lying completely flat.

Bear in mind that if your baby brings up a lot of milk, they may be hungry again quite quickly. However, it's best to try and stay in a routine of offering feeds rather than giving a feed straight away, even if they have been sick.

It can also help to raise the head end of your child's cot or crib when they are sleeping – try using books under the legs of the cot or crib, or placing a pillow underneath the mattress at the head end.

Never put pillows inside the cot. Your baby should always be laid down to sleep on their back.



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When should you take your baby back to a health care professional for further advice?

If reflux happens very frequently, or your baby is violently sick, appears to be in pain or you're worried for any other reason, talk to your Health Visitor or General Practitioner (GP) – especially if they have any of the following symptoms:

- coughing, gagging or trouble swallowing
- frequent projectile vomiting
- persistent crying and being irritable
- wheezing / rash
- bad breath
- difficulty sleeping
- arching their back during or after a feed
- drawing their legs up to their tummy after feeding
- refusing a feed even though they are happy to suck on a pacifier (dummy)
- poor weight gain, or losing weight



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This leaflet has been produced by GWH Paediatric Dietitians.

Telephone: 01793 605145 (Monday - Friday 9am – 4.30pm)

Smoking will not be permitted on any NHS site in England. Smoking will not be permitted within any of our buildings or anywhere outside on our sites. Smoking facilities will not be provided. Please be considerate of others when vaping in hospital grounds.

This information sheet is available to order in other languages and formats. If you would like a copy, please contact us on 01793 604031 or email gwh.pals@nhs.net.

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