



# Acid reflux

## why is this uncomfortable condition on the increase?

It feels like a burning pain in the lower chest area. It is often worse after eating, in the evening or when lying down or bending over. Sometimes it can even cause a bitter or acidic taste in your mouth. For the millions of people globally who suffer from acid reflux, these symptoms will sound all too familiar.

**A**cid reflux is a common condition that features a burning pain, known as heartburn, in the chest area just behind your breastbone. It happens when stomach contents, which includes food and acidic digestive juices, escape upwards into the gullet or oesophagus.

While occasional heartburn is no cause for alarm, what is alarming is that the number of people who experience acid reflux at least once a week has gone up by nearly 50%. A study conducted by the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in 2011 found that the number of people who experienced the symptoms of acid reflux at least once a week had risen by 47% over the previous decade.

This was apparent in both men and women and across

all ages, although middle age appeared to be when the most severe symptoms occurred. One of the main reasons for this overall increase could be most likely related to the increase in people being overweight and obese.

Besides being overweight, other risk factors include smoking, low levels of physical exercise and the use of certain medications, which include, amongst others, anti-depressants and some painkillers. Foods that exacerbate acid reflux include caffeine, alcohol, a high intake of salt, a low fibre diet, eating large meals, lying down within a few hours of eating a meal and consuming chocolate, carbonated drinks, and acidic juices. Pregnancy can also cause acid reflux.

In fact, heartburn can affect up to 85% of pregnant women, with many women experiencing heartburn during all three trimesters. The increase in the hormone progesterone during pregnancy causes the valve between the stomach and the oesophagus to relax, which allows stomach acid to pass into the oesophagus and irritate the lining, causing a burning sensation.

As people get older, they are also more likely to suffer from an increased incidence of acid reflux. This is because as you age, your muscles weaken, including the lower oesophageal sphincter, which controls the opening between the oesophagus and the stomach.

Fortunately, most people can manage the discomfort of

heartburn with lifestyle changes and over the counter medications.

One of the most effective ways to treat acid reflux is to avoid the foods and beverages that trigger symptoms. This includes eating smaller meals more frequently throughout the day and potentially changing the types of foods you are eating, quitting smoking, raising your pillow when lying down and eating at least two to three hours before sleeping. Most importantly, you should make diet and exercise changes if you are overweight.

Antacid suspension Gelusil Plus® is a treatment to relieve acid reflux. It has a dual mode of action that neutralises stomach acid whilst creating a barrier in the stomach to reduce acid reflux into the oesophagus. It is indicated for heartburn during pregnancy, with a recommended dosage of 10-20ml after meals and before bedtime.

Gelusil S® tablets are indicated for the relief of hyperacidity and flatulence associated with heartburn, gastritis and acid indigestion, and as a supplementary treatment for patients with peptic ulcers.

Heartburn that is more frequent or interferes with your daily routine may be a symptom of a more serious condition, which requires medical care. Speak to your doctor or pharmacist about ways to relieve and treat heartburn or if you are worried about your condition. ■

**For more information, visit [pregomega.co.za/gelusilplus/](http://pregomega.co.za/gelusilplus/)**

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