



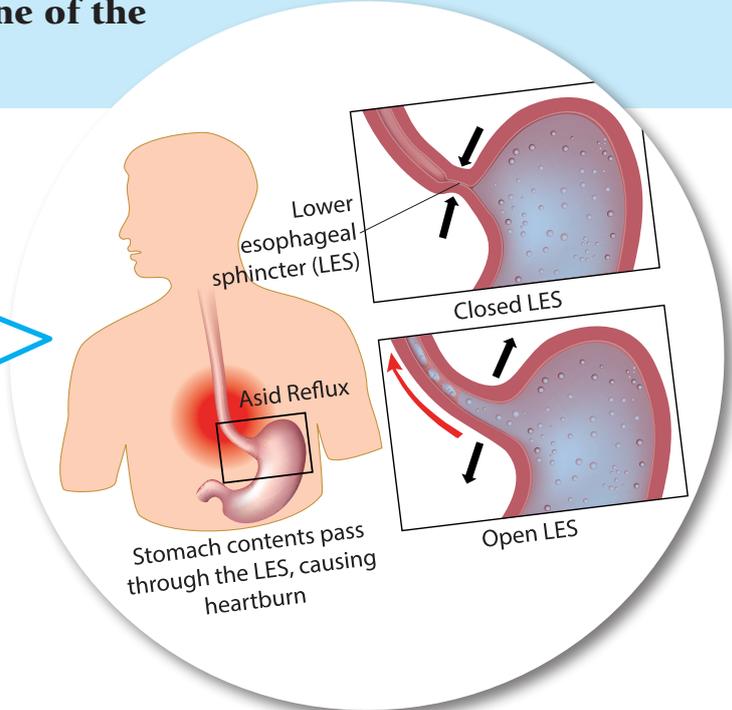
Dr Lee Hock Bee

Digesting Acid Reflux

It's estimated that 50% of the Malaysian adult population suffer from at least one gastro-intestinal condition, acid reflux being one of the most common.

The onset of acid reflux happens when you swallow. Normally, the lower esophageal sphincter (LES), relaxes to allow food and liquid to flow down into your stomach and closes soon after like a valve.

However, if this valve relaxes abnormally or weakens (i.e. hiatal hernia), stomach acid flows back up into your esophagus causing frequent heartburn. If this continues more than twice a week, you may be suffering from acid reflux disease.



You Are What You Eat!

Don't be surprised, but some daily routines and habits may increase your risk for acid reflux such as:

- Eating large meals or lying down right after a meal.
- Being overweight or obese.
- Snacking close to bedtime.
- Eating highly acidic foods like citrus, onions or spicy and fatty foods.
- Drinking certain beverages, such as alcohol, carbonated drinks, coffee, or tea which may lead to impairment, irritation or weakened LES.
- Smoking increases acid secretion, reducing LES muscle function and salivation as well as neutralizes the effect of acid.
- Being pregnant (increased hormones and pressure from growing baby).
- Taking aspirin, ibuprofen, certain muscle relaxers, or blood pressure medications.

Looking For Signs

Symptoms of acid reflux disease are numerous, but some are more commonly experienced than others:

Regurgitation – The feeling of acid backing up into your throat or mouth. Usually followed by a sour or bitter after taste as you vomit a little portion of your stomach's content.

Heartburn – Burning sensation that causes discomfort usually occurring in the middle of the abdomen or chest.

Dyspepsia – A general term for stomach discomfort or indigestion with its own set of symptoms:

- Burping
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea after eating
- Stomach fullness or bloating
- Upper abdominal pain and discomfort

Nevertheless, the factors for acid reflux are controllable; simple changes in lifestyle include balance diet and regular exercises help you relieve your symptoms. Consult your doctor if you are in doubt and remember, that prevention is better than a cure – a medical cliché definitely, but true nonetheless.

Dr Lee Hock Bee is a Gastrointestinal Surgeon and a committee member of Digestive Health Advisory Board. The author is not associated with and does not endorse any brands or products. For a free digestive health info guide or more information, please contact 03-5632 3301.