

# Parent Information

## How do I know if my baby has reflux?

### What is reflux?

Reflux (or gastro-oesophageal reflux) is when food from the stomach comes back up the oesophagus (food tube), or into the mouth. This is common in babies because the muscle at the top of the stomach is not yet strong enough to keep food down. In most babies, reflux causes no pain or problems with weight gain.

Both reflux and crying are very common in the early months, but are not necessarily related. Most babies who bring up milk are healthy and don't need medical treatment. Reflux gets better with time as your baby starts to eat solids, is able to sit up and the ring of muscle at the top of the stomach gets stronger.

Although it seems logical that reflux might cause babies to cry, studies show that reflux medications do not improve crying in most babies.

### What is NOT a sign of reflux?

If your baby does any of these things, they could be upset, but they are NOT a sign of reflux:

- Goes red in the face
- Pulls up their legs or knees
- Arches their back

### Is 'silent reflux' real?

- There is no proof that silent reflux exists. Silent reflux is used by some people to describe babies who don't have the common signs of reflux. Research studies show that there was no link between baby's reflux and crying time. Studies also showed that if a baby didn't vomit, they were unlikely to have reflux at all.
- Instead of silent reflux, these fussy or unsettled babies might be a high crier. You can talk about management strategies for your baby with your doctor.

### What is Gastro-oesophageal Reflux Disease (GORD)?

GORD is a medical diagnosis that refers to a small number of babies who have frequent vomiting, AND other symptoms like:


- Choking, coughing or wheezing during feeds
- Vomiting up blood
- Distress during feeds or refusal to feed
- Poor weight gain or weight loss

Some of these symptoms may also be a sign of a Cow's Milk Protein Allergy. If your baby has any of these, or you have any other concerns, you should discuss this with your doctor. In babies with GORD, doctors might prescribe medication to help treat these symptoms.

### What about medications to help with GORD?

If your baby has reflux, but not GORD, there are no medications that can help.

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Babies with GORD are sometimes given medications to reduce stomach acid. There are two types of these medications:

- Proton Pump Inhibitors (PPIs) such as Losec or Nexium
- H2 Receptor Antagonists (H2RAs) such as Zantac

These medications can help if your baby has GORD.

As with any medication there are potential risks and side effects. You should discuss these with your doctor or nurse.

Taking these medications means that babies may be at risk of the following harms compared to babies who do not take these medications:

- 3 to 6 times more likely to develop gastroenteritis (gastro) and pneumonia
- 4 times more likely to not get enough nutrients from their food
- almost 2 times more likely to have a bone fracture later on in life
- 2 times more likely to get an infection that causes severe diarrhoea (known as *Clostridium difficile* infection)
- 1.5 times more likely to develop asthma as a child

## So what can I do?

Having a baby with reflux or who cries a lot can be challenging and worrying. If your baby is vomiting but is otherwise happy and growing well, there is no need to worry. Keeping your baby upright for 10 minutes after a feed may help.

If your baby is unsettled and cries for long periods of time, you can find more information and useful strategies at PURPLE Crying ([purplecrying.info](http://purplecrying.info)), the Raising Children Network ([raisingchildren.net.au](http://raisingchildren.net.au)), or the MCRI Sleep Podcast ([mcri.edu.au/sleepodcast](http://mcri.edu.au/sleepodcast)).

It can also be useful to keep a diary to take note of how often your baby is crying and vomiting and when it is happening. That way you can keep an eye out for any changes, and discuss any concerns with your doctor.