

LARYNGOPHARYNGEAL REFLUX DISEASE

What is LPR?

LPR is the upward movement of stomach contents into the throat. Patients are usually unaware of LPR and often do not complain of heartburn - unlike gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD). Patients with LPR are more prone to excessive throat-clearing, a persistent dry cough, sore throats not associated with a cold, a hoarse voice or a feeling of something stuck in the throat. The treatment of LPR involves medication, dietary modifications and behavioural changes.

Medications

Proton Pump Inhibitors (PPIs) are very effective medicines for the treatment of LPR. A twice-daily prescription is recommended. Symptoms should start to improve within 2 to 6 weeks, so it is important to continue taking your medication even if you haven't noticed an improvement after 1 month.

PPIs should be taken on an empty stomach about ½ an hour before breakfast and dinner. The addition of antacids, such as Gaviscon, has been shown to have an added benefit in treating LPR. Gaviscon should be taken after breakfast and before going to sleep.

When ceasing the medication patients often feel fine for 1 to 3 weeks and then notice a gradual return of symptoms. Some people successfully come off the medication but may have to follow a strict diet (see below).

Dietary Changes

The following foods may worsen LPR: caffeine (e.g. coffee and tea), alcohol, chocolate, peppermints, citrus fruits (e.g. oranges and mandarins), kiwi, pineapples, tomatoes, spicy foods (e.g. hot mustard, curry, hot peppers or chilli), fatty foods (e.g. burgers and chips) and carbonated drinks (e.g. soda). Try initially reducing, rather than completely avoiding, these foods.

Behavioural Changes

Bending over, exercising or singing within 2 hours of eating a big meal can worsen LPR. Eating smaller meals throughout the day, instead of 3 larger meals, may improve LPR. Do not lie down within 3 hours after eating a large meal. Avoiding snacks just before bed is recommended. Sleeping with your head elevated (an extra pillow or raising the head of the bed) is very helpful at preventing stomach contents reaching your throat.

Frequent throat clearing can worsen LPR symptoms and negatively affect your voice. If you sense a build-up of secretions in the throat, try swallowing or taking a sip of water instead of clearing your throat.

Stress can also exacerbate LPR. It is important to try minimise stress levels at home and in the workplace for optimal LPR management.