

Reflux is a “backwards flow” of stomach acid moving back up into the esophagus. Normally stomach acid stays in your stomach because it is blocked from going up by the lower esophageal sphincter. When a person has a reflux problem, the sphincter is too weak to hold the acid back.

It can be painful and uncomfortable. The stomach’s lining is strong enough to stand the stomach acid but the esophagus is not. Over time the esophagus can be damaged by acid reflux. Simple changes in daily living and eating habits can help to prevent some of the damage.

In order to manage reflux or heartburn in scleroderma patients:

- Eat small, frequent meals to avoid overfilling your stomach
- Avoid eating two to three hours before bedtime
- Avoid foods that may aggravate symptoms such as citrus fruits, tomato products, greasy fried foods, coffee, garlic, onions, peppermint, gas-producing foods (such as raw peppers, beans, broccoli or raw onions), spicy foods, carbonated beverages and alcohol.

If you carry extra weight around your midsection, weight loss also may improve your symptoms. Use a sleep wedge or elevate the head of your bed to raise your head and torso to prevent regurgitation of stomach contents into airways.

It is important to keep in mind that smoking will also aggravate reflux in patients.

Foods to avoid to reduce reflux:

- Alcohol
- Caffeine, coffee (regular and decaf)
- Chocolate
- Acidic foods (citrus fruits like oranges, tomato sauce)
- Fried foods
- Raw vegetables
- Foods with high fat content (fast foods, nuts, dairy products)
- Spicy foods
- Onions

