

What Is a Hiatal Hernia?

Hiatal hernia is a condition in which a portion of the stomach protrudes upward into the chest, through an opening in the diaphragm. The diaphragm is the sheet of muscle that separates the chest from the abdomen.

What Causes a Hiatal Hernia?

The cause is unknown, but hiatal hernias may be the result of a weakening of the supporting tissue. Known risk factors in adults include:

- Increasing age
- Obesity
- Smoking

Who Is At Risk?

Children with this condition are usually born with it (congenital). It is often associated with gastroesophageal reflux in infants.

Hiatal hernias are very common, especially in people over 50 years old. This condition may cause reflux (backflow) of gastric acid from the stomach into the esophagus.

What Are the Symptoms of a Hiatal Hernia?

A hiatal hernia by itself rarely causes symptoms - pain and discomfort are usually due to the reflux of gastric acid, air, or bile. Reflux happens more easily when there is a hiatal hernia, although a hiatal hernia is not the only cause of reflux. Some symptoms of reflux include:

- Chest pain.
- Heartburn, worse when bending over or lying down.
- Difficulty swallowing.

How Is a Hiatal Hernia Diagnosed?

A hiatal hernia is often discovered during a test or procedure to determine the cause of heartburn or chest or upper abdominal pain, such as:

- **An X-ray of your upper digestive tract.** During a barium X-ray, you drink a chalky liquid containing barium that coats your upper digestive tract. This provides a clear silhouette of your esophagus, stomach and the upper part of your small intestine (duodenum) on an X-ray.
- **Using a scope to see inside your digestive tract.** During an endoscopy exam, your doctor passes a thin, flexible tube (endoscope) equipped with a light and video camera down your throat and into your esophagus and stomach to check for inflammation.

What Is the Treatment for a Hiatal Hernia?

Most people with hiatal hernias don't experience any signs or symptoms, and won't need treatment. If you experience signs and symptoms, such as recurrent heartburn and acid reflux, you may require treatment.

The goals of treatment are to relieve symptoms and prevent complications:

- Reducing the backflow of stomach contents into the esophagus (gastroesophageal reflux) will relieve pain. Medications that neutralize stomach acidity, decrease acid production, or strengthen the lower esophageal sphincter (the muscle that prevents acid from backing up into the esophagus) may be prescribed.

Other measures to reduce symptoms include:

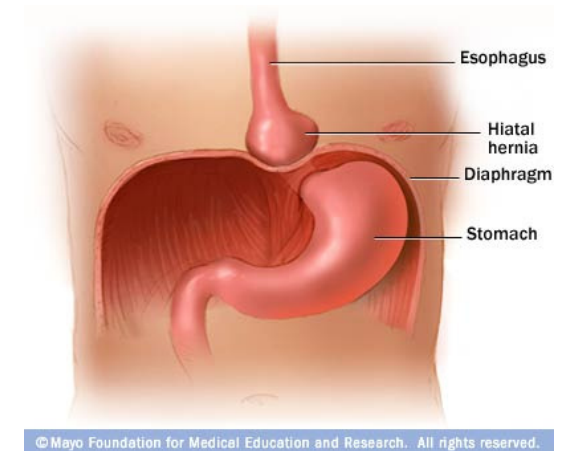
- Avoiding large or heavy meals.
- Not lying down or bending over immediately after a meal.
- Reducing weight.
- Avoiding smoking and being in smoky environments.
- If these measures fail to control the symptoms, or complications appear, surgical repair of the hernia may be necessary.

What Is the Prognosis for a Hiatal Hernia?

Most symptoms are alleviated with treatment.

Hiatal Hernia

*An informative
pamphlet*



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