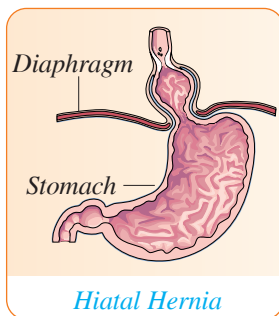




Hiatal Hernia

With a **hiatal hernia**, the normal action that closes off the top of the stomach does not work well. Food or stomach acids back up into the esophagus. This is known as **Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)**.



Signs & Symptoms

Many people have no symptoms with a hiatal hernia. Others have one or more of these problems:

- **Acid reflux.** Stomach acid backs up into the esophagus.
- Chest pain. *{Note: Don't assume that chest pain is due to a hiatal hernia. See **Chest Pain** at www.HealthyLearn.com.}*
- Pain in the esophagus. Heartburn.
- Hiccups. Belching after meals.
- A hard time swallowing.

Causes

The actual cause is not known. Risk factors are obesity, being a woman, or being middle aged. Smoking, lifting, strong coughing, and straining with bowel movements also increase the risk.

Treatment

Hiatal hernias are usually not serious problems. Often they can be treated with self-care. If not, surgery is an option.

Questions to Ask

Does a hiatal hernia cause pain at night often? Does it still bother you after using antacids and/or self-care?



Self-Care / Prevention

- Don't smoke. If you smoke, quit.
- Get regular exercise. This helps keep abdominal muscles in shape.
- Lose weight if you are overweight.
- Eat 5 to 6 small meals a day instead of 3 larger meals.
- Avoid alcohol, caffeine, and spicy foods.
- Don't lie down after eating. Wait 2 to 3 hours.
- Raise the head of the bed 6 inches. Put 6 inch blocks under the legs of the head of the bed or put a 6 inch wedge between the mattress and box springs at the head portion. Don't prop your head up with pillows. Doing this puts pressure on your stomach area and can help force acid up into the esophagus.
- Don't strain to pass stool.
- Take over-the-counter antacids or acid controllers, such as Pepcid AC or Tagamet HB. *{Note: Read the labels before taking. Check with your doctor, too. Adverse side effects are more likely and more severe in older persons who take some acid controllers, such as Tagamet HB.}*
- If you take aspirin, ibuprofen, or naproxen sodium, take it with food.