



# HIATAL HERNIA

## WHAT IS A HIATAL HERNIA?

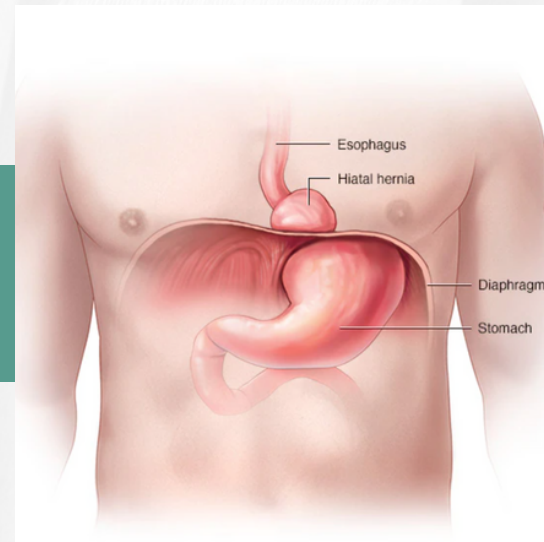
- A hiatal hernia occurs when the upper part of the stomach bulges through the large muscle (diaphragm) that separates the abdomen and the chest.
- The hiatus is a small opening in the diaphragm. The esophagus; the tube used for swallowing food, passes through the hiatus before connecting to the stomach.
- When a hiatal hernia occurs the stomach pushes up through that opening and into the chest
- A small hiatal hernia typically doesn't cause problems. A large hiatal hernia can cause food and acid to back up into the esophagus leading to heart burn

## SYMPTOMS

- Heartburn
- Trouble swallowing
- Acid reflux
- Chest or abdominal pain
- Shortness of breath
- Feeling full soon after eating
- Regurgitation (backward flow of swallowed food)
- Vomiting blood or passing of black stool (could indicate bleeding in digestive tract)

## POSSIBLE CAUSES

- Age related changes in diaphragm
- Injury to area (trauma or certain surgery)
- Being born with very large hiatus
- Constant and intense pressure on surrounding muscles. This can occur with coughing, vomiting, straining during bowel movement, and heavy lifting



## HOW ARE YOU DIAGNOSED?

- **X-ray of upper digestive system**
  - You drink a chalky liquid that coats your digestive tract allowing visualization of the outline of the esophagus, stomach and upper intestine
- **Endoscopy**
  - A thin tube with a camera is passed down your throat to look inside your esophagus and stomach for inflammation
- **Esophageal manometry**
  - Measures the rhythmic muscle contraction of esophagus when you swallow

## RISK FACTORS

Age 50 or older

Obesity

## TREATMENT

- **Antacids that neutralize stomach acid** (mylanta, rolaids, tums) provide quick relief but don't heal inflamed esophagus
- **Medications to reduce acid production** (Histamine blockers, pepcid). Provide longer relief and may decrease acid production from stomach for up to 12 hours (Over the counter and prescription forms)
- **Medication that block acid production** and heal the esophagus (proton pump Inhibitors such as omeprazole). (Over the counter and prescription forms)

## SURGERY

- Sometimes hiatal hernia require surgery
- Surgery to repair hiatal hernia may involve pulling the stomach down into the abdomen and making the opening in the diaphragm smaller.
- It could also involve reshaping the muscles of the lower esophagus to prevent contents of the stomach from coming back up

## LIFESTYLE CHANGES

- Eat several smaller meals throughout the day rather than a few large meals.
- Don't eat foods that trigger heartburn (fatty or fried foods, tomato sauce, alcohol, chocolate, mint, garlic, onion, and caffeine)
- Avoid lying down after a meal or eating late in the day.
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Stop smoking