

Hiatal hernia

Definition

Hiatal hernia is a condition in which part of the stomach extends through an opening of the diaphragm into the chest. The diaphragm is the sheet of muscle that divides the chest from the abdomen.

Alternative Names

Hernia - hiatal

Causes

The exact cause of hiatal hernias is unknown. The condition may be due to weakness of the supporting tissue. Your risk for the problem goes up with age, [obesity](#), and smoking. Hiatal hernias are very common. The problem occurs often in people over 50 years.

This condition may cause [reflux](#) (backflow) of gastric acid from the stomach into the esophagus.

Children with this condition are most often born with it (congenital). It often occurs with [gastroesophageal reflux in infants](#).

Symptoms

Symptoms may include:

- [Chest pain](#)
- [Heartburn](#), worse when bending over or lying down
- Swallowing difficulty

A hiatal hernia by itself rarely causes symptoms. Pain and discomfort are due to the upward flow of stomach acid, air, or bile.

Exams and Tests

Tests that may be used include:

- [Barium swallow x-ray](#)
- Esophagogastroduodenoscopy ([EGD](#))

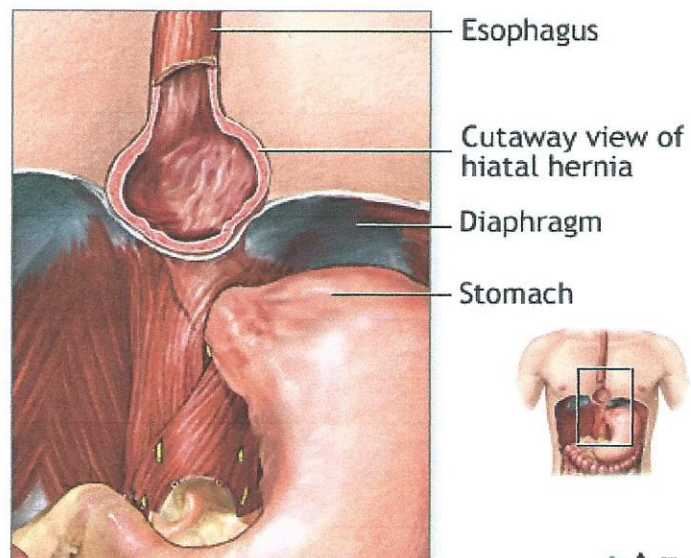
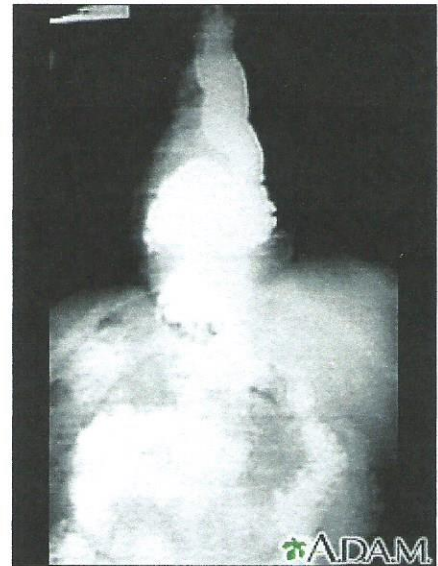
Treatment

The goals of treatment are to relieve symptoms and prevent complications. Treatments may include:

- Medicines to control stomach acid
- Medicine to strengthen the muscles in the lower esophagus that keeps stomach contents from backing up
- [Surgery to repair the hiatal hernia](#)

Other measures to reduce symptoms include:

- [Avoiding large or heavy meals](#)



- Not lying down or bending over right after a meal
- Reducing weight and not smoking
- Raising the head of the bed 4 to 6 inches

If medicines and lifestyle measures do not help control symptoms, you may need surgery.

Outlook (Prognosis)

Treatment can relieve most symptoms of hiatal hernia.

Possible Complications

Complications may include:

- Pulmonary (lung) [aspiration](#)
- Slow bleeding and [iron deficiency anemia](#) (due to a large hernia)
- Strangulation (closing off) of the hernia

When to Contact a Medical Professional

Call your health care provider if:

- You have symptoms of a hiatal hernia.
- You have a hiatal hernia and your symptoms get worse or do not improve with treatment.
- You develop new symptoms.

Prevention

Controlling risk factors such as obesity may help prevent hiatal hernia.

References

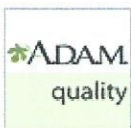
Falk GW, Katzka DA. Diseases of the esophagus. In: Goldman L, Schafer AI, eds. *Goldman's Cecil Medicine*. 25th ed. Philadelphia, PA: Elsevier Saunders; 2016:chap 138.

Ferri FF. Hiatal hernia. In: Ferri FF, ed. *Ferri's Clinical Advisor 2015*. Philadelphia, PA: Elsevier Mosby; 2015:p. 571-2.

Petersen RP, Pellegrini CA, Oelsclanger BK. Hiatal hernia and gastroesophageal reflux disease. In: Townsend CM Jr, Beauchamp RD, Evers BM, Mattox KL, eds. *Sabiston Textbook of Surgery*. 19th ed. Philadelphia, PA: Elsevier Saunders; 2012:chap 44.

Review Date: 4/20/2015

Reviewed By: Subodh K. Lal, MD, Gastroenterologist with Gastrointestinal Specialists of Georgia, Austell, GA. Review provided by VeriMed Healthcare Network. Also reviewed by David Zieve, MD, MHA, Isla Ogilvie, PhD, and the A.D.A.M. Editorial team.



[A.D.A.M., Inc. is accredited by URAC](#), also known as the American Accreditation HealthCare Commission (www.uran.org). URAC's [accreditation program](#) is an independent audit to verify that A.D.A.M. follows rigorous standards of quality and accountability. A.D.A.M. is among the first to achieve this important distinction for online health information and services. Learn more about A.D.A.M.'s [editorial policy](#), [editorial process](#) and [privacy policy](#). A.D.A.M. is also a founding member of Hi-Ethics and subscribes to the principles of the Health on the Net Foundation (www.hon.ch).

The information provided herein should not be used during any medical emergency or for the diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. A licensed medical professional should be consulted for diagnosis and treatment of any and all medical conditions. Links to other sites are provided for information only – they do not constitute endorsements of those other sites. © 1997- 2016 A.D.A.M., Inc. Any duplication or distribution of the information contained herein is strictly prohibited.

