



Guide to Understanding Hiatus Hernia

Description

A hiatal hernia is part of the stomach that protrudes through the diaphragm and into the chest. A hiatal hernia forms at the opening of your diaphragm where your food pipe (esophagus) joins your stomach. Part of the stomach pushes through this opening causing a hiatal hernia.

The symptoms include acid reflux, sour taste in the mouth, and pain, similar to heartburn, in the chest and upper stomach areas. In most patients, hiatus hernias cause no symptoms. This results in an uncomfortable feeling of burning, warmth, heat, or pain behind the breastbone (sternum) that may occur after eating, soon after lying down, or when bending forward, and it may be intermittent.

Causes

Possible causes or contributing factors for having a hiatal hernia are:

- Obesity
- Poor seated posture (such as slouching)
- Frequent coughing
- Straining with constipation
- Frequent bending over or heavy lifting
- Heredity
- Smoking
- Congenital defects

Treatment

Patients who experience the symptoms of hiatal hernia should elevate the head of their beds 6-9 inches. They should also avoid lying down immediately after meals. In addition to these, exercising regularly is important.

Treatment for mild symptoms begins with making lifestyle changes and, if needed, taking nonprescription antacids, acid reducers, or acid blockers. If symptoms are continual or severe, you may have GERD (GastroEsophageal Reflux Disease). Treatment for GERD usually requires stronger prescription



Some hints on how to treat Hiatal Hernia

- ✓ Eat small meals
- ✓ Avoid alcohol, caffeinated drinks, chocolate, spicy foods, and spearmint and peppermint gums. All of these increase production of the stomach acid. Decaffeinated beverages can sometimes irritate esophageal lining. Try to limit citrus fruit and tomato-based foods.
- ✓ Limit fatty foods
- ✓ Sit up after eating, and do not exercise immediately after eating.