

# Hiatal Hernia

## Your Digestive System

Your diaphragm is a muscle used to breathe. Your diaphragm lies between your chest and your stomach. When you breathe in, your diaphragm flattens and your chest expands as your lungs inflate with oxygen.

Your esophagus is a tube that passes food from your mouth to your stomach. In the middle of your diaphragm, there is a small opening (hiatus) that your esophagus moves through.

## Hiatal Hernia

Your stomach should lie below your diaphragm. A hiatal hernia happens when the upper part of the stomach moves into the chest through a small opening (hiatus) in the diaphragm.

A hiatal hernia can affect anyone at any age.

## Causes

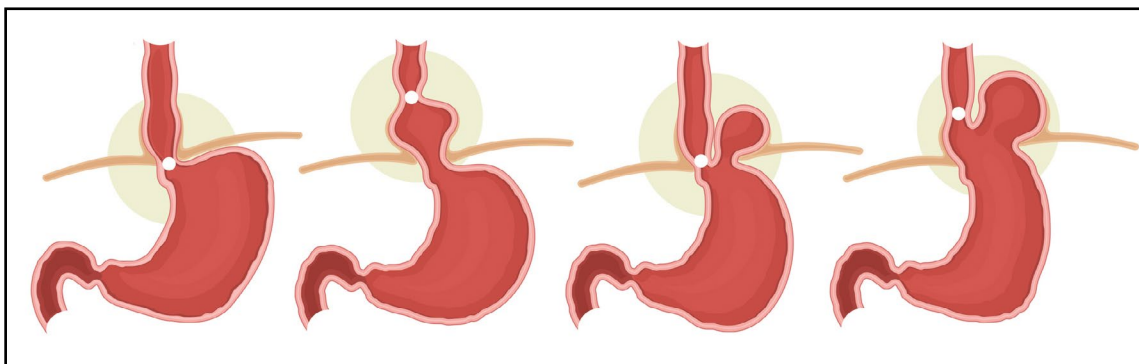
The cause of a hiatal hernia is not clear. You may be more likely to get one if:

- the opening in your diaphragm is weaker than normal
- you are overweight
- you strain your diaphragm if you cough hard for a long time or if you do heavy physical activities
- you have family members who have had a hiatal hernia.

## Types of Hiatal Hernias

There are several types of hiatal hernias. Your health care provider will talk with you about the type of hernia you have. See the drawing below.

### Types of hiatal hernias



Normal stomach and esophagus

Type 1 Sliding hiatal hernia

Type 2 Paraesophageal hiatal hernia

Type 3 Mixed hiatal hernia

## Symptoms

Symptoms of a hiatal hernia are:

- heartburn (acid reflux)
- regurgitation (stomach acid or stomach contents back up into your esophagus)
- chest pain or upper abdominal pain
- shortness of breath
- trouble swallowing
- feeling full quickly
- anemia (low red blood cell count).

## Treatment

- **Diet and lifestyle changes:** Your health care provider may recommend diet and lifestyle changes such as:
  - do not eat foods or drink beverages that can increase acid reflux. This includes:
    - acidic foods like citrus and tomatoes
    - alcohol
    - chocolate
    - coffee
    - fried or fatty foods
    - peppermint.
  - eat small meals
  - do not eat anything for 2 to 3 hours before you go to bed
  - do not lie down after you eat
  - lose weight if you are overweight
  - raise the head of your bed 6 to 8 inches.

- **Medicine:** Keep taking any medicine your health care provider prescribes to treat your heartburn. Talk with your provider to determine which medicine is best for you.
- **Surgery:** You may need surgery (minimally invasive) if other treatments don't work.

During surgery, your surgeon will make several small cuts (incisions) in your abdomen to repair the hiatal hernia and bring your stomach back below your diaphragm.

For more information about hiatal hernia surgery, visit [allinahealth.org/gerdsurgery](https://allinahealth.org/gerdsurgery) or speak with your health care provider.

## When To Call Your Health Care Provider

Call your health care provider if you have:

- trouble breathing
- problems swallowing
- chest pain.