



The Surgical Institute  
at True North

CHE MILLER MD | KAYLA WATKINS-JONES MD  
BRETT LOCKE APRN

# Paraesophageal Hernia

## What is a Paraesophageal Hernia?

### Paraesophageal Hernia/Hiatal Hernia Overview

The diaphragm is a muscular structure that separates the abdominal cavity from the chest cavity. The esophagus passes through the diaphragm via an opening called the esophageal hiatus. Sometimes a portion of the stomach protrudes through the esophageal hiatus into the chest cavity. When this happens, this is referred to as a paraesophageal hernia or hiatal hernia.

### Paraesophageal Hernia Risk Factors

The two most common risk factors for a paraesophageal hernia include age (occurring more commonly in patients over the age of 50 due to muscle weakness) and obesity. Additional risk factors may include pregnancy and trauma.

### Paraesophageal Hernia Symptoms

Hiatal hernias do not usually cause symptoms. In some cases though, hiatal hernias cause stomach acid to leak into the esophagus. This is called acid reflux or gastroesophageal reflux. It may cause symptoms such as burning in the chest, burning in the throat or an acid taste in the throat, stomach or chest pain, difficulty swallowing, a raspy voice or a sore throat, and unexplained cough.

### Paraesophageal Hernia Diagnosis

A hiatal hernia is often discovered during a test or procedure to determine the cause of heartburn or chest/upper abdominal pain. These procedures may include an x-ray of the upper abdomen called a barium swallow, upper endoscopy (an EGD) with direct visualization of the hernia, and esophageal manometry which measures the rhythmic muscle contractions in the esophagus with swallowing.

## **Paraesophageal Hernia Treatment**

Most people with a hiatal hernia do not experience any signs or symptoms and won't require treatment. If a patient experiences symptoms such as recurrent heartburn and acid reflux, medication or surgery may be needed.

**Medication** - Antacids that neutralize stomach acid. Antacids such as Mylanta, Rolaids and Tums may provide quick relief. Overuse of some antacids can cause side effects including diarrhea or kidney problems.

Medications to reduce acid production are called H2 receptor blockers. These include Cimetidine (Tagamet), Famotidine (Pepcid), and Nizatidine (Axid).

Medications that block acid production and heal the esophagus include proton pump inhibitors (PPI). These are stronger acid blockers than H2 receptor blockers and allow time for damaged esophageal tissue to heal. Over-the-counter proton pump inhibitors include lansoprazole (Prevacid), Omeprazole (Prilosec), and Esomeprazole (Nexium). Stronger versions are available in prescription form.

## **Surgery for Paraesophageal Hernia**

Sometimes a hiatal hernia requires surgery. Surgery is generally reserved for those people who aren't helped by medications to relieve heartburn and acid reflux, or have complications such as severe inflammation or narrowing of the esophagus. Surgery involves wrapping the upper part of the stomach (called the fundus) around the lower portion of the esophagus. This creates a permanently tight sphincter (valve) so that stomach contents will not move back or reflux into the esophagus.