



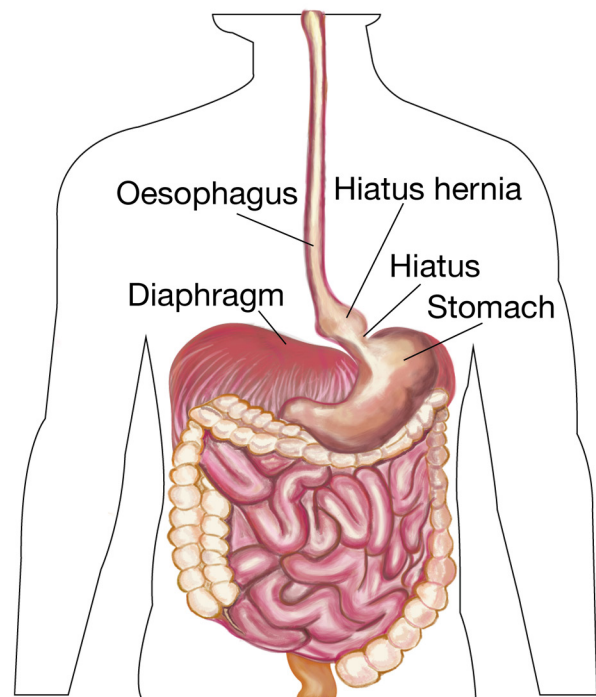
Hiatus hernia

Information for patients from the Trust's Endoscopy Units

What is a hiatus hernia?

A hernia is when part of an organ protrudes (pushes) through a muscular wall that holds it in place.

A hiatus hernia is when part of the stomach slides through an opening in the diaphragm called the hiatus. The diaphragm is a sheet of muscle that separates your chest from your abdomen (tummy).



What causes hiatus hernia and how common is it?

The exact number of people with a hiatus hernia is not known, as many people with a hiatus hernia do not have symptoms. However, they are thought to be common. Some studies suggest that up to a third of people develop a hiatus hernia sometime in their life, most commonly in middle age. Many hiatus hernias are small.

The cause of hiatus hernia is not clear. It is thought that most develop in people over the age of 50. It may be that the diaphragm weakens with age and allows part of the stomach to protrude through the diaphragm. Factors which increase the risk of developing a hiatus hernia include weight lifting, obesity, and pregnancy.



What are the symptoms?

- The most common symptoms include **acid reflux** and **heartburn**. This may happen if your hiatus hernia stops the valve at the bottom of your oesophagus from closing properly causing acid from your stomach to rise into your oesophagus (gullet).
- Other symptoms may include **pain in your upper abdomen and chest, feeling sick, an acid taste in your mouth, bloating, belching, and a burning pain when you swallow hot drinks**. These symptoms can come and go, and are more likely to be worse after a meal or when you are lying down.
- Some uncommon symptoms may happen. If you get any of the following symptoms it can make your diagnosis difficult as these symptoms can mimic other conditions.
 - **A persistent cough**, particularly at night; this is due to the refluxed acid irritating your trachea (windpipe).
 - Other mouth and throat symptoms such as **gum problems, bad breath, sore throat, hoarseness, and a feeling of a lump in your throat**.
 - **Severe chest pain** develops in some cases (and may be mistaken for a heart attack).
- Many people who have a hiatus hernia have no symptoms at all.

Symptoms can be made worse by smoking, drinking a lot of coffee or alcohol, diet (eating spicy, greasy food), fizzy drinks, being overweight, wearing tight clothes around your abdomen, and stress.

How is a hiatus hernia diagnosed?

A hiatus hernia may be diagnosed if you have tests for your symptoms. Endoscopy is the common test. This is where a thin, flexible telescope is passed down your oesophagus into your stomach. This allows a doctor or specialist nurse to look inside; a hiatus hernia may be seen. A special x-ray test called a barium swallow is an accurate alternative to confirm a hiatus hernia.

How will my hiatus hernia be treated?

If you have no symptoms, you do not need any treatment.

If you have reflux symptoms, then treatment will concentrate on any symptoms you may be experiencing associated with the acid reflux. The following tips may help relieve any symptoms you may experience from your hiatus hernia.

- Eat smaller meals and do not eat late at night or before you lie down. Avoid eating a large meal just before you go to bed.
- When lifting or picking things up, bend from your knees. Bending from your waist may allow acid to travel back into your gullet and cause pain.
- Do not smoke; smoking relaxes the muscle at the base of your gullet and allows acid to flow back into it.
- If you are overweight, try losing some weight.
- Avoid hot, spicy foods, and cut down how much alcohol you drink.
- Avoid tight clothing around your waist as this increases the pressure on your stomach.
- Medications may include antacids and acid-suppressing drugs. This will need to be prescribed by your doctor.
- Rarely, a hiatus hernia causes severe symptoms of reflux which are not helped so well with medication. Therefore, an operation is sometimes advised.

Any further questions?

Please phone the **Endoscopy Unit**. The units are open Monday to Sunday 8am to 6pm.

- William Harvey Hospital, Ashford Telephone: 01233 61 62 74
- Kent and Canterbury Hospital, Canterbury Telephone: 01227 78 30 58
- Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother Hospital, Margate Telephone: 01843 23 43 70

If you have any questions between 6pm and 8am Monday to Sunday then contact the **Emergency Department** on:

- William Harvey Hospital, Ashford Telephone: 01233 61 62 07
- Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother Hospital, Margate Telephone: 01843 23 50 30

A short film outlining what patients can expect when coming to hospital for an endoscopy is available on the East Kent Hospitals web site www.ekhufft.nhs.uk/endoscopy/

Our units are regularly inspected and audited; please ask if you want any information about our performance standards. You can also visit www.patientopinion.co.uk

This leaflet has been produced with and for patients

If you would like this information in **another language, audio, Braille, Easy Read, or large print** please ask a member of staff. You can ask someone to contact us on your behalf.

Any complaints, comments, concerns, or compliments please speak to your doctor or nurse, or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01227 78 31 45, or email ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net

Patients should not bring in large sums of money or valuables into hospital. Please note that East Kent Hospitals accepts no responsibility for the loss or damage to personal property, unless the property had been handed in to Trust staff for safe-keeping.

Further patient leaflets are available via the East Kent Hospitals web site www.ekhufft.nhs.uk/patientinformation