Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol Aneurin Bevan University Health Board

Patient Information

Hiatus Hernia

Gastroenterology

About half the population over the age of 50 has a hiatus hernia. It is not clear what causes a hiatus hernia. It may be that the diaphragm weakens with age and that this allows part of the stomach to slip up towards the chest cavity.

The hernia itself does not usually cause problems in its onw right, but symptoms can occur when the hernia weakens the valve at the bottom of the food pipe, causing the following -

- **heartburn**
- **sudden surge of stomach contents upward into the food pipe.**
- **acid reflux causing burning sensation in the chest or even into the mouth with bitter tasting fluid.**
- **bloating and belching**

Although medication from your doctor can help to some extent in controlling these symptoms, there are several things you can do yourself which can improve things. **In some cases, by altering your lifestyle, you may be able to cope without needing medicines to help you.** The following tips may help –

Smoking

Nicotine relaxes the muscle at the bottom of the gullet and allows the stomach contents to back flow into the gullet.

- ✓ Try to cut down on your smoking,
- ✓ Better still stop smoking.



We know how hard it can be to give up smoking. But when you're ready to stop, you don't have to go it alone. Stop Smoking Wales offers free, friendly, local NHS support that really works.

Stop Smoking Wales will help you plan and prepare for your quit date and provide ongoing help and advice. Contact Stop Smoking Wales on (free phone) 0800 085 2219.

Help is also available from the Practice Nurse.

Weight

You can check if you are overweight with your doctor or practice nurse, who are able to give you dietary advice.

- ✓ If you are overweight - try to reduce it.
- ✓ Even losing 3kg (1/2 a stone) can improve symptoms for up to 40% of people.
- ✓ Losing weight will help to reduce pressure on your stomach and can prevent problems with acid regurgitation.



Eating pattern

Large meals increase pressure on the stomach, as do large volumes of fluid. (e.g., pints of beer) This can cause the contents of your stomach to surge back into the gullet.

- ✓ Moderate size regular meals are best for you.
- ✓ If you are a fast eater, try to slow down.
- ✓ Limit the volume of fluid consumed as overfilling your stomach will increase the chance of acid heartburn.



Timing of meals

Lying flat in bed with a full stomach will aggravate your symptoms.

- ✓ Don't eat late at night. Try to allow 3-4 hours for digestion before bedtime.
- ✓ Raise the head of the bed up 8-10 inches by **one** of the following methods:-
  - ✓ Putting pillows under the upper part of the mattress.
  - ✓ Putting a wedge under the upper part of the mattress.
  - ✓ Putting bed blocks under the legs at the head end of your bed.
- ✓ Gravity then helps keep the stomach contents where they are meant to be and out of the food pipe at night.
- ✓ Sleep propped up on a few pillows (under the shoulders and head) to help prevent acid regurgitation and heartburn at night.





Types of food

Some foods slow down the emptying of the stomach or cause your symptoms. **You may find that things improve if you restrict or avoid the following:-**

- ✓ Very hot or fizzy drinks
- ✓ Chocolate and peppermint/spearmint
- ✓ Very spicy or rich food
- ✓ Foods like onions and peppers



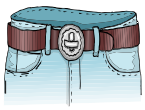
- ✓ Fatty food like fried food, heavy pastry or cakes
- ✓ Tea or coffee, which increase acid levels and aggravate heartburn.
- ✓ Large volumes of alcohol, or neat spirits.



Posture

Poor posture will bring on your symptoms: so, try the following:-

- ✓ Eat sitting upright; try not to hunch over your food
- ✓ Try not to bend or stoop after eating. Try to reach down by kneeling instead of bending from the waist.
- ✓ Wear looser clothing around the stomach.
- ✓ Take care with waist belts, and try to avoid corsets and girdles which can put pressure on the stomach.
- ✓ Take care with strenuous abdominal exercises and weight lifting which can bring on the symptoms.
- ✓ If your symptoms occur at night, you may find it useful to sleep in a more upright position.



Making these changes could help, but it will take time!

If your symptoms change or worsen, particularly if you should have any new and persisting stomach problems, please do not hesitate to talk to your doctor or your practice nurse.

Remember medicine can only help to an extent in this common problem. Making positive changes to your lifestyle is also important.

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