

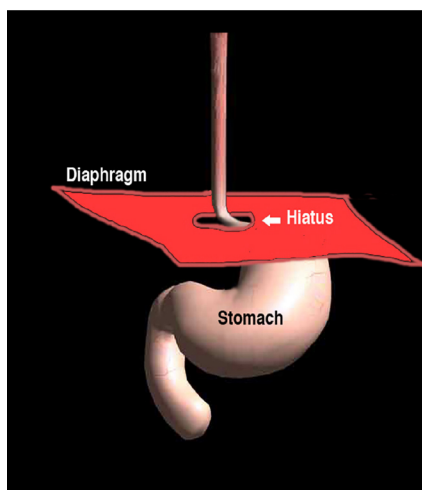
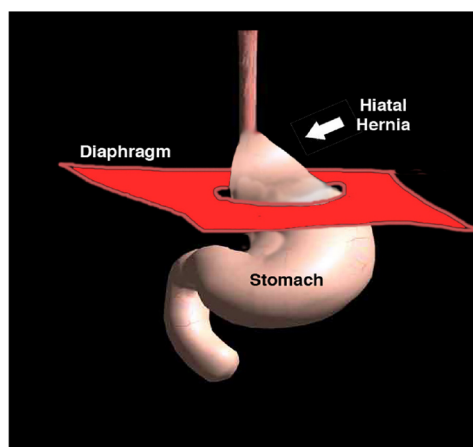
What is a Hiatal Hernia?

Robert Fusco, MD

You may have heard the term “**hiatal hernia**” before. It is a fairly common medical term, but you may not really know what it means. It is really very simple.

Between your chest cavity and your abdomen, there is a flat muscular membrane called the diaphragm. This divider separates your chest from your abdominal organs. Of course, your heart and lungs are in the chest and, normally, all of your stomach is below the diaphragm. There is a small hole in the middle of the diaphragm called the “hiatus” which allows your esophagus (food pipe) to enter the abdomen and connect to the top of your stomach organ.

Sometimes the hiatus hole weakens and becomes enlarged. This allows part of the stomach to rise up, or herniate, through the hiatus into chest. Thus the term *hiatal hernia*.



A small hiatal hernia usually doesn't cause problems. You may never know you have one unless it is found during a routine examination. But a large hiatal hernia can allow food and acid to back up, or reflux, into your esophagus, leading to heartburn. Over time untreated acid reflux can damage the lower esophagus causing ulcers, problems swallowing, and even cancer of the esophagus. Good treatment is available. If you have persistent heartburn; if it occurs more than three times a week; if it awakens you at night; if you are taking TUMS frequently; or if you have difficulty swallowing, you should call your doctor for an appointment.



Many thanks to our Endoscopy Center Manager Jayme Moskovitz RN BSN(left) and our Executive Director Colleen Jakubovic who led us through another successful Medicare Recertification and Pennsylvania Department of Health annual inspection of our freestanding endoscopy center - THREE RIVERS ENDOSCOPY CENTER. Founded in 1996, we were the first such facility in Western Pennsylvania. We have passed all inspections over the past 24 years. Patients should take comfort in knowing that our endoscopy center has to pass all aspects of patient safety much like a general hospital facility. Thank you ladies!!



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