

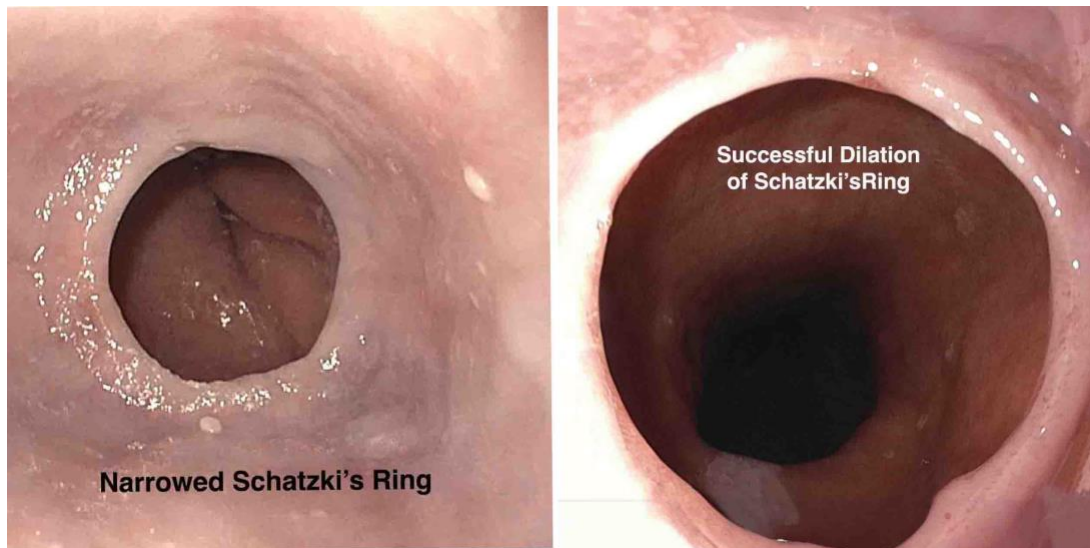


Schatzki's Ring

The human body is a complex system of interconnected organs and structures, each with a specific role in maintaining our overall health. One such structure is the esophagus, a long, hollow tube that runs from our throat to our stomach, allowing food and liquid to travel into our digestive system. But what happens when this vital passageway becomes narrow? One such condition is known as Schatzki's Ring.

What is a Schatzki's Ring?

Schatzki's Ring, also known as a mucosal ring, is a thin ring of fibrous tissue that forms in the lower esophagus. This ring is noncancerous and is made of tissue that lines the esophagus. The formation of this ring results in a narrowing of the esophagus, which can cause difficulty swallowing, a condition known as *dysphagia*.



Why "Schatzki's Ring"?

Schatzki's Ring is named after a German Radiologist, Richard Schatzki, who fled Nazi Germany in 1933 and emigrated to the United States. He became an American citizen and served during WWII, reaching the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Later, he became a professor at Harvard Medical School. He was the first to diagnose this peculiar esophageal ring in 1953 based on barium X-rays. He was also an accomplished pianist and played with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. He died in 1992 at 90, but his name lives on in Gastroenterology clinics worldwide.

Symptoms of Schatzki's Ring

The primary symptom of a Schatzki's Ring is **dysphagia**, a medical term for difficulty swallowing. The normal esophagus is very flexible or stretchy. If you don't chew well, the esophagus wall will expand slightly to allow the food particles (called a *food bolus*) to pass. However, a Schatzki's ring is made of fibrous tissue that is not flexible. If the food bolus is larger than the ring, the food will not pass. The food bolus will become stuck in the lower esophagus, a condition called a *food impaction*. This sensation is very uncomfortable, somewhat painful, and frightening. Food impactions seem to occur most often with bread, meat, or clumpy rice.

The next bite of food will have no place to go - compounding the discomfort. In the early stages, the episodes might be infrequent and mild. Drinking a glass of water will force the food bolus to pass through the ring and down into the stomach with great relief. As the ring narrows, this often will not work, and the water will be forcibly regurgitated across the dinner table – much to the horror of your dinner companions. In this situation, most individuals will rush to the restroom and attempt to forcibly vomit to relieve the obstruction. Most patients begin to change their diet, avoiding foods that are tough to chew. Some patients just stop eating in public for fear of another attack.

Causes of Schatzki's Ring

The exact cause of Schatzki's Ring is not known. However, it is believed that certain factors may increase your risk of developing this condition. These can include aging and acid reflux or just bad luck. A

Schatzki's ring is often associated with a separate condition called Eosinophilic Esophagitis, a form of food allergy that also causes esophageal rings and dysphagia.



How Does Your Doctor Know?

There are a variety of medical conditions, some more serious, that may cause dysphagia. If you're experiencing difficulty swallowing, seeking medical attention is essential. An accurate diagnosis is the first step in treatment. Your physician may use a variety of tests to diagnose this condition, including a combination of patient history, symptom analysis, and specialized imaging. A barium swallow test is a non-invasive X-ray procedure where patients drink a barium solution that coats the esophagus, highlighting any abnormalities. *Upper GI Endoscopy, a more direct approach, involves painlessly inserting a flexible tube with a camera down the throat*

under sedation to visually inspect the esophagus and identify any rings or narrowing. Biopsies are often taken for special testing.

Treatment

Once a Schatzki's Ring is diagnosed, the main goal is to improve symptoms. This may include:

1. **Esophageal dilation** is usually performed for symptomatic esophageal rings. This outpatient procedure involves stretching the narrowed area, often using a “cigar-shaped” balloon dilator during an upper endoscopy exam. The esophageal balloon dilators come in a variety of sizes. To avoid complications, you can only dilate the esophagus so much in one session. A very tight ring may require repeated sessions over time using a slightly larger dilator each time.



Esophageal balloon dilators are measured on the FRENCH scale. The French scale was devised by [Joseph-Frédéric-Benoît Charrière](#), a 19th-century Parisian maker of surgical instruments, who defined the "diameter times 3" relationship. The outer diameter of a balloon dilator in millimeters can be determined by dividing the French size by 3. An increasing French size corresponds to a larger external diameter. Common esophageal balloon dilators range in size from 30F (10 mm) to 60F (20 mm). Swallowing is fairly normal at 45F (15 mm) or above.

2. **Dietary modifications** are an important part of treatment. Dilation will allow easier passage of food. However, it is important to understand that the dilation procedure does not make the ring more flexible. Patients have to adjust their eating habits permanently. They should be eating softer, well-cooked foods, eating slower, chewing well, drinking plenty of water with meals, and avoiding large, hard-to-chew items. They can no longer “bolt down” their food and should always be the last ones to finish their meal. This is a lifelong recommendation.
3. **Suppressing acid reflux** seems to slow down the recurrence of the ring, but dilation is not permanent. Over time, the ring usually narrows and has to be periodically redilated. Proton pump inhibitors like Prilosec are often prescribed.

Conclusion

Living with Schatzki's Ring requires an understanding of the condition and a proactive approach to management. With appropriate medical care and dietary adjustments, individuals with Schatzki's Ring can lead a comfortable life. It's a journey of adaptation and resilience, but with

the right support and knowledge, it's a manageable one. Remember, it's essential to consult with a healthcare provider if you're experiencing any difficulty swallowing.

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