



## Esophageal Dilation

The human body is a complex machine; like any machine, it sometimes needs a little maintenance to keep it running smoothly. One such maintenance procedure is esophageal dilation, a treatment that can help alleviate discomfort and improve the quality of life for people experiencing difficulties swallowing.

### What is Esophageal Dilation?

Esophageal dilation is a medical procedure designed to widen or stretch a narrowed section of the esophagus, the tube that connects your throat to your stomach. This narrowing, also known as a

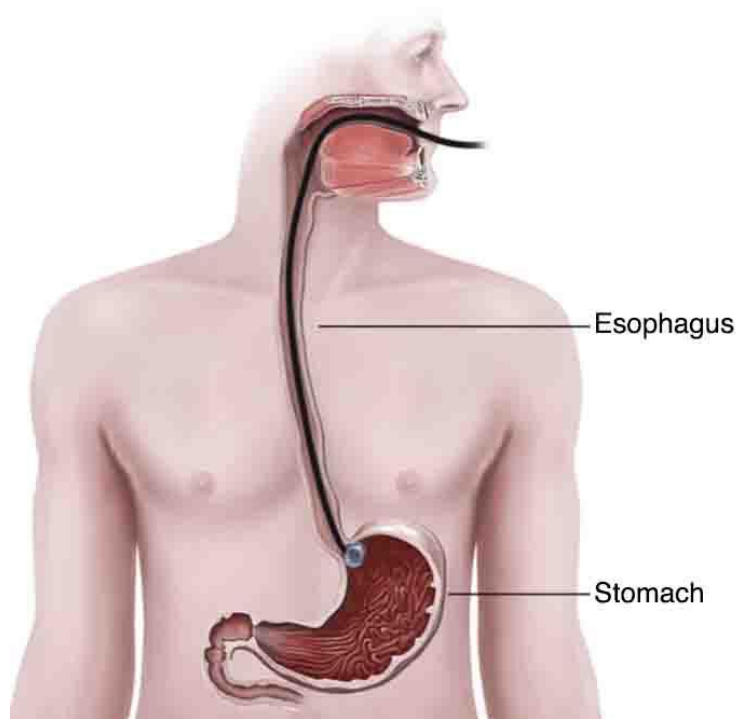
stricture, can cause discomfort, pain, and difficulties with swallowing, a condition medically known as *dysphagia*.

The procedure can be performed using various techniques, depending on the patient's specific needs and the doctor's expertise. It is usually part of a sedated upper endoscopy, where the patient is put under sedation, and the doctor uses a unique instrument called an endoscope to visualize and dilate the esophagus.

### Why is Esophageal Dilation Performed?

The most typical reason for esophageal dilation is to treat strictures brought on by scarring from stomach acid reflux, a condition that patients with chronic heartburn frequently experience. These strictures can make swallowing difficult and uncomfortable, with food feeling like it's stuck in the chest area.

However, other causes of esophageal narrowing may necessitate dilation. These include esophageal rings or webs, which are thin layers of excess tissue; esophageal cancer; scarring from radiation treatment; or motility disorders that affect how the esophagus moves.



## Preparing for the Procedure

Preparation for esophageal dilation involves several steps to ensure the procedure is safe and effective. First, patients are usually asked to fast for at least six hours before the examination to ensure the stomach is empty. This reduces the risk of aspiration during the procedure.

Patients should also inform their doctor about their medications, especially aspirin products, anticoagulants (blood thinners), or clopidogrel. While most medications can be continued as usual, some may require dose adjustments before the procedure. It's also important to disclose any allergies to medications and any existing medical conditions, such as heart or lung disease.

**WARNING:** Individuals taking the semaglutide class of medications known as (GLP-1) receptor agonists may delay how their stomach empties. This may interfere with colonoscopy preparation AND increase the risk of aspiration under anesthesia for BOTH colonoscopy and upper endoscopy (EGD) exams. ALL patients taking these medications MUST stop them temporarily for 1 week before their procedure appointment. Failure to do so will result in the cancellation of the procedure, which will have to be rescheduled.



## The Procedure: What to Expect?

During esophageal dilation, the patient may be sedated to help them relax. The doctor will then pass an endoscope through the patient's mouth and into the esophagus, stomach, and duodenum. This does not interfere with the patient's breathing. Depending on the patient's condition, the doctor may use a dilating balloon or plastic dilators over a guiding wire to stretch the esophagus. During this process, patients may experience mild pressure in the back of the throat or chest. X-rays may also be used during the procedure to guide the dilation.

## After the Procedure: What's Next?

Following esophageal dilation, patients are typically observed briefly before being allowed to return to their normal activities. *We suggest a light soft diet 24 hours after esophageal dilation.* Most patients can resume a normal diet the next day, although a mild sore throat may persist for the remainder of the day. Even after successful esophageal dilation, patients with dysphagia should always take smaller bites, chew very well, and drink plenty of water with each meal.

Since sedation is used during the procedure, patients are monitored in a recovery area until they were ready to leave. They cannot drive for 24 hours after the procedure, as the sedatives can affect judgment and reflexes. Therefore, arranging for someone to accompany the patient home is advisable.

## Risks and Complications

Like any medical procedure, esophageal dilation carries some risks, although complications are rare when experienced doctors perform the procedure. Potential complications include

perforation or tearing of the esophagus lining, which may result in bleeding and require surgery. There are also potential side effects from the sedatives used during the procedure.

Patients should be vigilant for early signs of complications, such as chest pain, fever, difficulty breathing, difficulty swallowing, bleeding, or black bowel movements, and should contact their doctor immediately if any of these symptoms occur.

### **Insurance Coverage and Repeat Dilations**

Insurance coverage for esophageal dilation varies, so you should check with your insurance provider to understand what costs will be covered. Repeated dilations may be necessary, depending on the cause and degree of the esophageal narrowing. This allows for gradual dilation, which reduces the risk of complications. Once the stricture is fully dilated, further dilations may not be required.

In conclusion, esophageal dilation is a safe and effective procedure for treating esophageal strictures and improving swallowing difficulties. By understanding what the procedure involves and what to expect, patients can make informed decisions about their healthcare and work with their doctors to achieve the best possible outcomes.

## **Center For Digestive Health & Nutrition**

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The Center for Digestive Health & Nutrition is a private medical practice comprised of experienced Gastroenterologists, Nurse Practitioners, and staff members dedicated to preventing and treating digestive disorders. Our physicians have been serving the needs of those in Western Pennsylvania and surrounding areas since 1977, having cared for tens of thousands of individuals with digestive problems. Our mission is to deliver high-quality gastroenterology services efficiently and cost-consciously. We realize the very sensitive nature of GI illness and understand the necessity to provide our services in an environment that stresses patient privacy and confidentiality and where patient satisfaction is the goal. Appointments can be conveniently scheduled online via our website above. Learn more about digestive issues on Instagram @thedigestivetract

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