

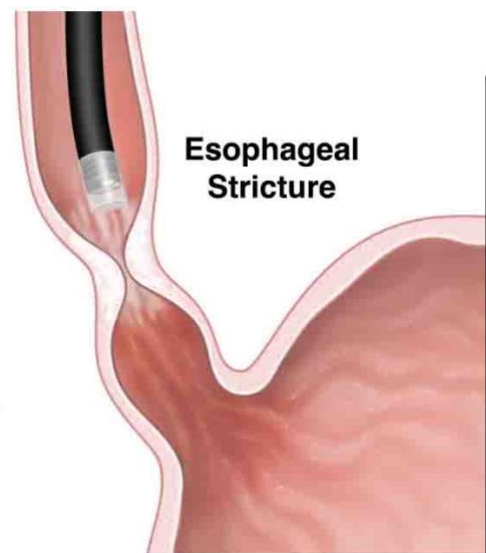


Esophageal Stricture

The human body is a complex system of interconnected organs and structures, each with a specific role in maintaining overall health. One such structure is the esophagus, a muscular tube connecting our throat to our stomach. This tube allows food and liquid to travel down our digestive system. But what happens when this vital passageway becomes narrow and tight? This condition is known as an esophageal stricture.

What is an Esophageal Stricture?

An esophageal stricture is an abnormal narrowing or tightening of the esophagus. Like a “kink in a hose,” this condition makes it more difficult for food and liquid to travel down the tube from the throat to the stomach. The term “benign” is often used to describe this condition, indicating that it's not cancerous.



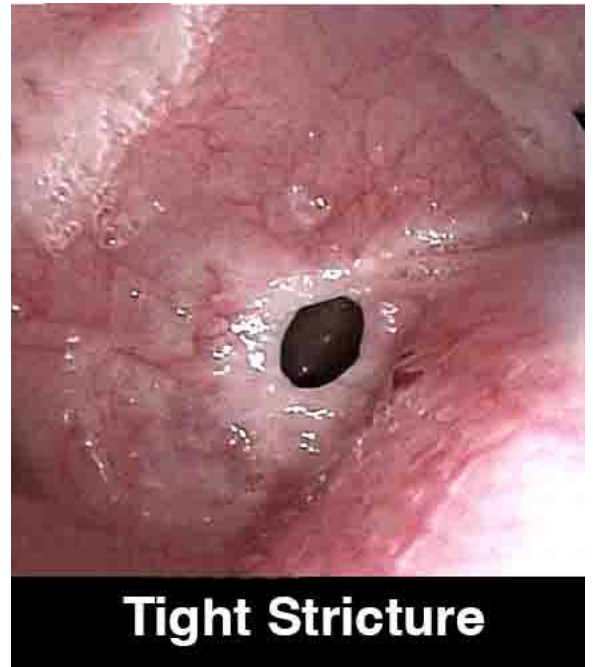
Symptoms of Esophageal Stricture

The primary symptom of an esophageal stricture is dysphagia, which is the medical term for difficulty swallowing. Moving food or liquid from your mouth to your stomach requires more time and effort. Dysphagia can be painful, and in some cases, swallowing may even become impossible. Occasional difficulty swallowing, such as when you eat too fast or don't chew your food well enough, usually isn't cause for concern. However, if you consistently have trouble swallowing, it may indicate a more severe condition like an esophageal stricture. Patients often complain of difficulty swallowing items such as meat, bread, and clumpy rice.

Causes of Esophageal Stricture

A variety of factors can cause esophageal strictures. Understanding these causes can help in both prevention and treatment.

1. [Chronic Acid Reflux \(GERD\)](#): The most common cause of esophageal strictures is damage from stomach acid. In gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), stomach acid frequently flows back into the esophagus, irritating its lining. Over time, this acid exposure can lead to inflammation and scarring, causing the esophagus to narrow.
2. [Hiatal Hernia](#): A hiatal hernia occurs when part of the stomach pushes up through the diaphragm into the chest cavity. This condition is very common and seldom causes dysphagia unless the hernia is very large or associated with chronic acid reflux.
3. [Eosinophilic Esophagitis](#): (EoE): EoE is an allergic inflammatory condition of the esophagus. In EoE, a type of white blood cell called eosinophil builds up in the esophagus, causing inflammation and leading to the formation of strictures. This is the most common cause of esophageal stricture in children and young adults.
4. Infections: Certain infections can cause inflammation and scarring in the esophagus. These infections might include fungal infections like Candida or viral infections such as herpes simplex virus.
5. Radiation Therapy: Patients undergoing radiation therapy for cancer in the chest or neck area may develop strictures as a side effect of the treatment.
6. Ingesting Harmful Substances: Accidentally swallowing caustic substances, such as household cleaners, can severely damage the esophagus, leading to strictures.
7. [Schatzki's Ring](#): This condition is characterized by a tissue ring forming at the esophagus's lower end. While it can be congenital, it is often associated with chronic acid reflux and can lead to difficulty swallowing.



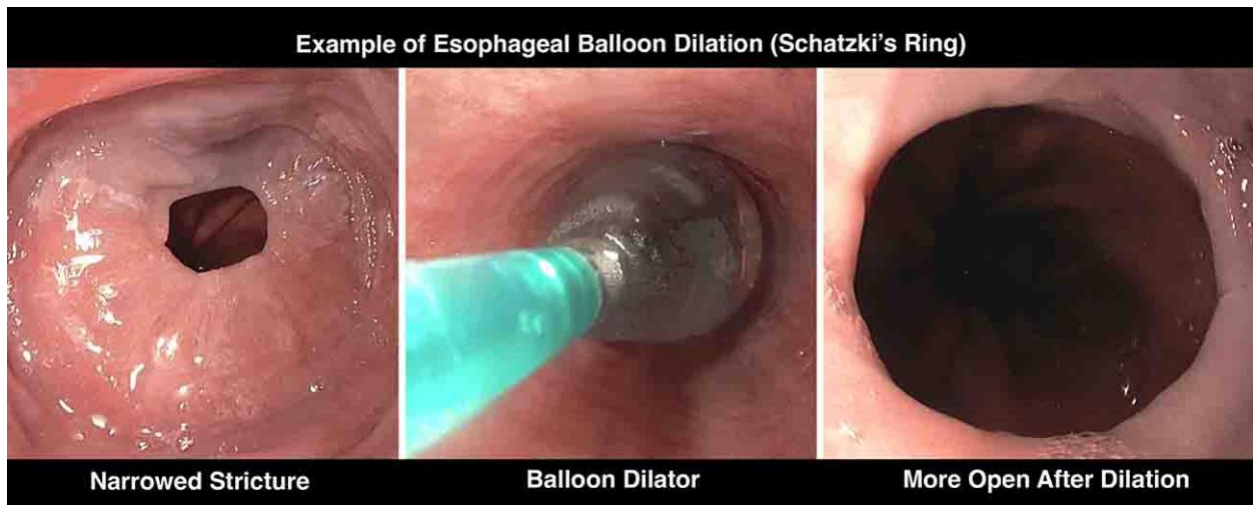
Treatments for Esophageal Strictures

The treatment for esophageal strictures depends on the cause and severity of the condition. Here are some common treatments:

1. [Endoscopic Balloon Dilation](#): This type of dilation involves a “hot-dog” shaped balloon attached to an endoscope, a thin, flexible tube with a camera at the end. The balloons come in different sizes. The endoscope is inserted into the esophagus, and the balloon is inflated to stretch the narrowed area. After several minutes, the balloon is deflated and removed. This procedure is often done under sedation or anesthesia to ensure patient comfort. Endoscopic balloon dilation is highly effective and can provide significant relief from symptoms. Repeat dilations are usually required.

2. Medication:

- Proton Pump Inhibitors (PPIs): These drugs reduce the production of stomach acid, helping to manage GERD and prevent further damage to the esophagus. Common examples are Prilosec (omeprazole), Nexium (esomeprazole), and Protonix (pantoprazole). They are taken long-term to help delay the return of the stricture. Before we had these drugs, many patients required repeat dilatation at frequent intervals.
 - Steroids: To reduce inflammation in conditions like EoE, swallowed oral steroids may be prescribed. Fluticasone and budesonide are the most frequently prescribed drugs. A remarkable new injectable drug called Dupixent may be more effective in treating this chronic condition.
 - Antibiotics or Antifungals: If an infection is causing the stricture, appropriate antimicrobial therapy will be necessary.
3. Surgery: In severe cases where other treatments fail, surgery may be needed to remove the narrowed section of the esophagus or to repair any underlying condition, such as a very large hiatal hernia.
4. Lifestyle Changes: Patients with GERD are often advised to make lifestyle changes to reduce acid reflux. These can include dietary adjustments, losing weight, quitting smoking, and avoiding alcohol.
5. Dietary Modifications: For those with swallowing difficulties, modifying the texture and consistency of food can help. Soft, moist foods are easier to swallow, and patients might be advised to eat smaller, more frequent meals. *They should always take smaller bites, chew well, and drink plenty of fluid with meals.*



Conclusion

Esophageal strictures can significantly impact a person's quality of life, making it difficult to swallow and eat. Understanding the causes and treatments of this condition is crucial for managing symptoms and improving health. If you experience persistent difficulty swallowing, it's essential to seek medical advice to determine the underlying cause and receive appropriate

treatment. Esophageal cancer is much less common than benign stricture, but any case of new-onset dysphagia requires very careful evaluation to establish an accurate diagnosis. With proper care, most people with esophageal strictures can find relief and return to a normal, comfortable way of eating and drinking.

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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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