

Digestive Health Center

Esophageal Stricture

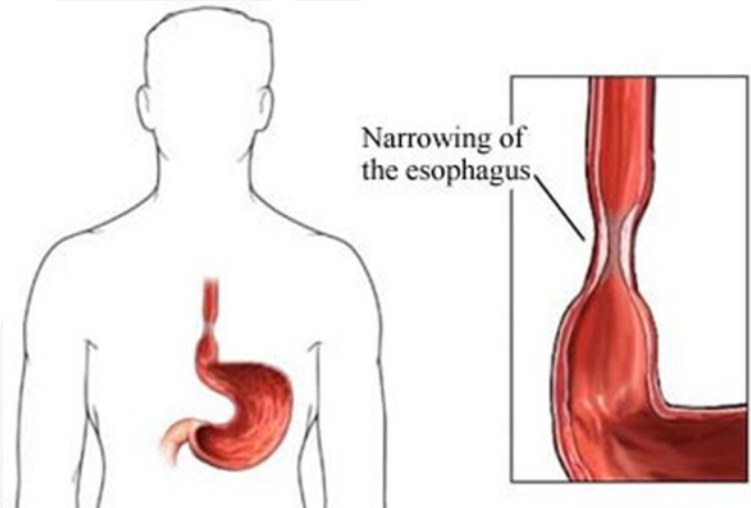
Definition

Esophageal stricture is when the esophagus narrows, making it hard to swallow. The esophagus is a muscular tube that carries food and liquids from the mouth to the stomach. Esophageal stricture may cause large chunks of food to get stuck in the esophagus. If you suspect you have this condition, contact your doctor.

Causes

Esophageal stricture is typically caused by scar tissue that develops as a result of the following:

- Chronic heartburn, known as gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)—a condition where stomach acid flows into the esophagus, causing a burning sensation in the lower chest
- Prolonged use of a nasogastric tube (a tube that is inserted through the nose to the stomach)
- Ingestion of corrosive substances, such as household cleaning agents
- Treatment of esophageal varices (enlarged veins in the esophagus)
- Injuries caused by an endoscope (a thin, lighted tube used to see inside the body)
- Esophageal cancer
- Injuries caused by medications that can irritate the esophagus (such as some medications to treat osteoporosis and some antibiotics)



Risk factors

A risk factor is something that increases your chance of getting a disease or condition. Scarring due to acid irritation, increases your chances of developing esophageal stricture. The most common cause of esophageal stricture is GERD. If you have this risk factor, tell your doctor.

Symptoms

If you experience any of these symptoms, do not assume it is due to esophageal stricture. These symptoms may be caused by other, less serious health conditions. If you experience any one of them, see your doctor.

Symptoms include:

- Difficulty swallowing
- Pain when swallowing
- Unintentional weight loss
- Regurgitation of food (when food flows back from the stomach into the esophagus or mouth)

Diagnosis

Your doctor will ask about your symptoms and medical history and perform a physical exam. You may need to see a doctor who specializes in the diagnosis and treatment of disorders of the gastrointestinal tract and liver (gastroenterologist). The gastrointestinal tract includes the mouth, esophagus, stomach, duodenum, small intestine, large intestine (colon), rectum, and anus.

Tests may include:

- Barium swallow—a series of X-rays of the esophagus during and after drinking a barium solution
- Endoscopy—examination of the esophagus using a lighted, flexible instrument called an endoscope

Treatment

Talk with your doctor about the best treatment plan for you. **Treatment options include the following:**

Esophageal dilation

Esophageal dilation is a procedure your doctor performs to stretch or widen your esophagus. Your doctor will pass an endoscope through your mouth and into the esophagus, stomach, and duodenum. He will either inflate a small balloon or use tapered plastic dilators to stretch your esophagus. For your comfort, your doctor may perform this procedure while you are sedated and may apply a local anesthetic to the back of your throat. Repeat dilations are often required to adequately stretch the esophagus.

Proton pump inhibitors

When esophageal stricture is caused by GERD, proton pump inhibitors, or acid-blocking medicines, are used to prevent the stricture from returning.

If you are diagnosed with esophageal stricture, follow your doctor's instructions.

Prevention

To help reduce your chances of getting esophageal stricture, take the following steps:

- See your doctor if you have GERD.
- Avoid ingesting corrosive substances.

RESOURCES:

American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy