



GastroDoxs
— defenders of the digestive system —

Esophageal Strictures

A Practical Guide For Patients

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Introduction: Esophageal Strictures

Esophageal strictures refer to the abnormal narrowing of the esophagus, the muscular tube that carries food and liquids from the mouth to the stomach. This narrowing can impede swallowing and lead to discomfort, malnutrition, and weight loss if left untreated. Strictures can develop gradually due to chronic inflammation, scarring from acid reflux (GERD), injury from medical procedures, radiation therapy, or ingestion of corrosive substances. They may also be associated with underlying conditions such as eosinophilic esophagitis or cancer. Symptoms often include difficulty swallowing (dysphagia), a sensation of food sticking in the chest, and sometimes pain while eating. Diagnosis typically involves endoscopy, imaging studies, and sometimes biopsy to rule out malignancy. Early identification and treatment are essential to prevent complications, improve swallowing function, and maintain overall nutritional health. Treatment options range from **medications and dietary modifications to dilation procedures or surgery.**

Key Takeaways

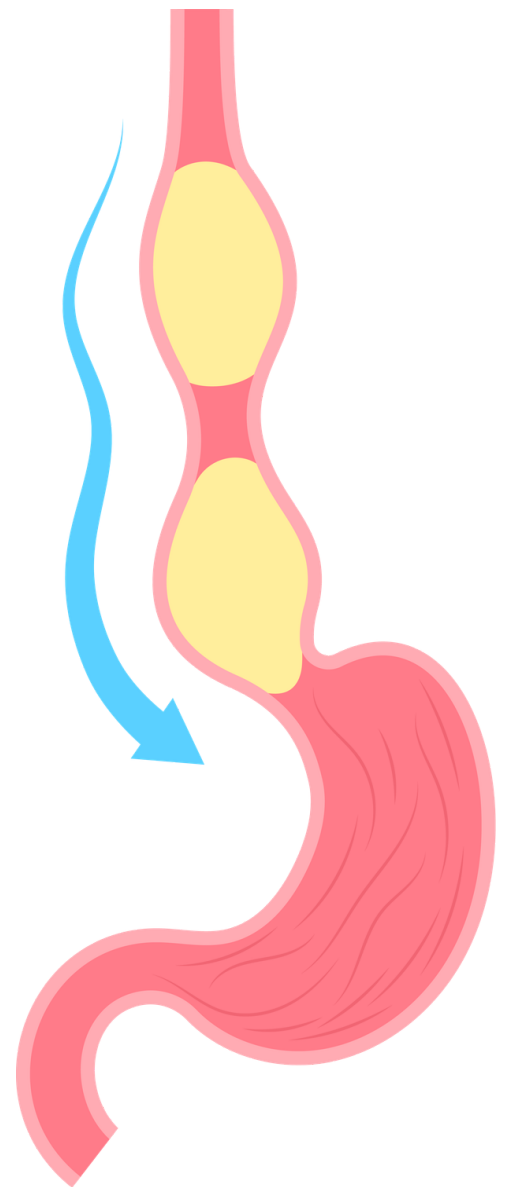
- Esophageal strictures involve abnormal narrowing of the esophagus.
- They can cause **difficulty swallowing, chest discomfort, and food impaction.**
- Chronic acid reflux (GERD) is a common cause.
- Other causes **include injury, radiation, eosinophilic esophagitis, and cancer.**
- Symptoms may develop gradually and worsen over time.
- Diagnosis requires **endoscopy, imaging, and sometimes biopsy.**
- Early treatment prevents **malnutrition, dehydration, and complications.**



What Causes Esophageal Strictures?

Known Causes

Esophageal strictures occur when the esophagus becomes narrowed due to inflammation, scarring, or other structural changes. The most common cause is **chronic gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)**, where repeated acid exposure damages the esophageal lining, leading to scar tissue formation. Other causes include **esophageal injury from medical procedures**, such as endoscopy or radiation therapy, and **ingestion of corrosive substances** like strong acids or alkalis. Eosinophilic esophagitis, an allergic **inflammatory condition**, can also result in strictures, particularly in children and young adults. Less commonly, esophageal tumors can obstruct the passage, mimicking or causing strictures. Certain infections, especially in immunocompromised individuals, may contribute as well. Risk factors such as prolonged inflammation, smoking, alcohol use, and certain medications (like NSAIDs) increase the likelihood of stricture development. Early identification of underlying causes is critical to guide effective treatment and prevent complications such as **malnutrition, dehydration, or complete obstruction**.



Common Signs & Symptoms

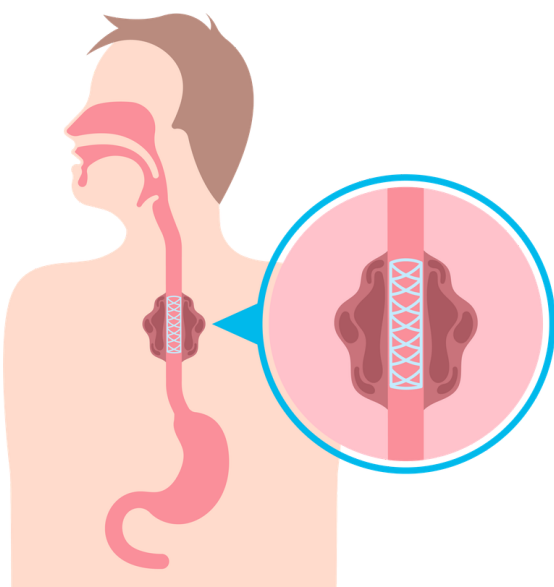
Common signs of esophageal strictures include **difficulty swallowing solids, sensation of food sticking in the chest, pain while swallowing, regurgitation, heartburn, unexplained weight loss, frequent choking, and occasional hoarseness.** Symptoms often worsen gradually over time.

Core Symptoms Include:

- Difficulty swallowing (dysphagia), particularly with solid foods
- Painful swallowing (odynophagia)
- Sensation of food getting stuck in the chest or throat
- Frequent regurgitation of food
- Persistent heartburn or acid reflux
- Unexplained weight loss



Severe cases can also cause:



- Complete esophageal obstruction
- Malnutrition due to inadequate food intake
- Dehydration from difficulty swallowing liquids
- Recurrent aspiration pneumonia from food entering the airway
- Severe chest pain or discomfort
- Esophageal perforation (rare, life-threatening)



Diagnosis & Medical Testing

Diagnosis of esophageal strictures involves **endoscopy to visualize narrowing and obtain biopsies**, **barium swallow X-rays** to assess structure and motility, and **esophageal manometry** in some cases. Early detection ensures proper treatment and prevents complications.

Diagnostic Tools

- **Endoscopy (Esophagogastroduodenoscopy, EGD):** Direct visualization and biopsy of the esophagus.
- **Barium Swallow X-ray:** Highlights narrowing and motility issues.
- **Esophageal Manometry:** Measures muscle contractions and swallowing function.
- **CT Scan:** Evaluates surrounding tissues and rules out tumors.
- **Esophageal pH Monitoring:** Detects acid reflux contributing to strictures.
- **Biopsy:** Confirms underlying conditions like eosinophilic esophagitis or cancer.
- **Endoscopic Ultrasound (EUS):** Assesses the depth of stricture and nearby structures.
- **Chest X-ray:** Occasionally used to detect complications such as aspiration.
- **MRI:** Rarely used for detailed soft tissue assessment.
- **Laboratory Tests:** Check for anemia or nutritional deficiencies related to chronic dysphagia.



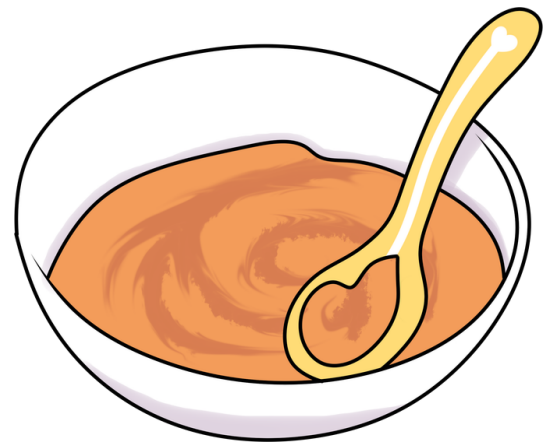
Diet

A soft, easy-to-swallow diet is recommended for esophageal strictures.

Pureed foods, soups, smoothies, and moist, tender foods help reduce swallowing difficulty. Avoid hard, dry, or sticky foods, as they may worsen obstruction or discomfort.

Key Insights

- Prefer **soft or pureed foods** to ease swallowing.
- Include **soups, smoothies, and mashed vegetables**.
- Avoid **hard, dry, or sticky foods**.
- Chew food thoroughly before swallowing.
- Eat **smaller, more frequent meals**.
- Drink **plenty of fluids** to aid digestion.
- Limit **spicy, acidic, or highly processed foods**.
- Monitor for **food that triggers discomfort or reflux**.
- Maintain adequate **protein and calorie intake** to prevent malnutrition.
- Consider **nutritional supplements** if eating is limited.
- Eat in a **calm, upright position**.
- Avoid **eating late at night** to reduce reflux risk.

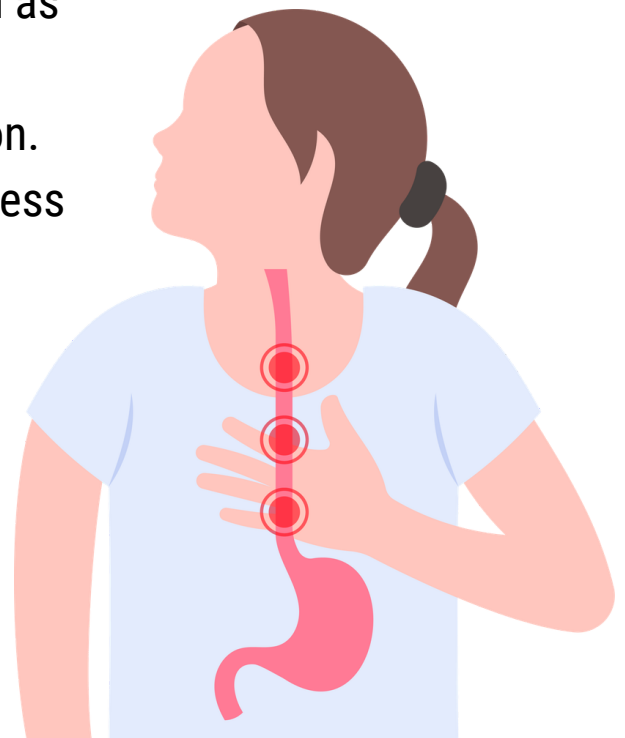


Medications & Treatment Options

Medications for esophageal strictures include **proton pump inhibitors (PPIs)** to reduce acid reflux and corticosteroids for inflammation. Treatment options also involve **esophageal dilation procedures, dietary modifications, and, in severe cases, surgery** to restore proper swallowing function.

Treatment Options

- Esophageal dilation using balloons or bougies to widen the narrowed area.
- Proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) to reduce acid reflux and prevent further scarring.
- Corticosteroids for inflammation, especially in eosinophilic esophagitis.
- Dietary modifications with soft or pureed foods.
- Endoscopic stent placement in severe or recurrent strictures.
- Surgical intervention for complex or non-responsive strictures.
- Treatment of underlying conditions, such as GERD or eosinophilic esophagitis.
- Nutritional support to prevent malnutrition.
- Regular monitoring via endoscopy to assess stricture recurrence.
- Pain management when swallowing is uncomfortable.
- Lifestyle modifications, including avoiding smoking and alcohol.
- Swallowing therapy guided by a speech-language pathologist in selected cases.

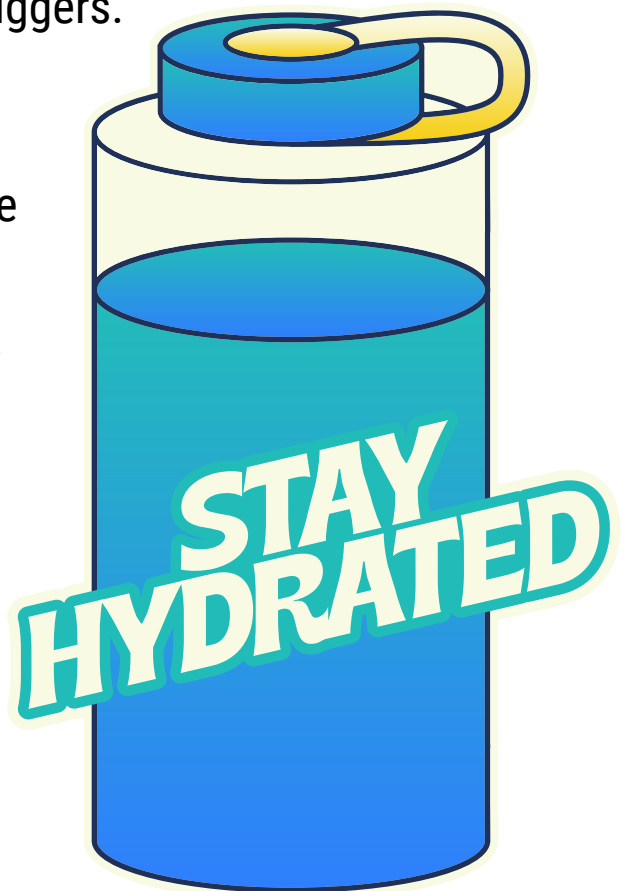


Advanced Therapies & Procedures

Advanced therapies for esophageal strictures include **endoscopic balloon or bougie dilation, stent placement, and endoscopic incision techniques**. In severe or recurrent cases, **surgical reconstruction or esophagectomy** may be required to restore esophageal function and prevent complications.

Therapy Options

- Endoscopic dilation to widen the esophagus.
- Endoscopic stent placement for persistent or severe narrowing.
- Corticosteroid therapy for inflammatory strictures.
- Proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) to manage reflux.
- Swallowing therapy with a speech-language pathologist.
- Nutritional counseling for safe, adequate intake.
- Lifestyle modifications to reduce reflux triggers.
- Endoscopic incision or stricturotomy in select cases.
- Surgical reconstruction for non-responsive strictures.
- Esophagectomy for malignant or complex strictures.
- Regular endoscopic monitoring to detect recurrence.
- Pain management strategies during swallowing.
- Hydration optimization to ease swallowing and digestion.



Coping With **Esophageal Strictures**

Coping with esophageal strictures involves **adhering to a soft-food diet, eating smaller meals, managing acid reflux, and following medical treatments**. Emotional support, nutritional guidance, and regular monitoring help maintain health and improve quality of life.

Practical Strategies

- Eat small, frequent meals to ease swallowing.
- Focus on soft, moist, or pureed foods.
- Chew thoroughly before swallowing.
- Avoid hard, dry, or sticky foods.
- Maintain upright posture while eating.
- Stay hydrated with fluids during meals.
- Manage acid reflux with medications and lifestyle changes.
- Monitor weight and nutrition regularly.
- Attend scheduled endoscopic check-ups.
- Seek support for stress or anxiety related to eating.
- Use nutritional supplements if needed.
- Avoid smoking and alcohol, which worsen symptoms.
- Plan meals to allow relaxed, unhurried eating.
- Communicate symptoms clearly with your healthcare provider.
- Follow medical advice for underlying conditions like GERD or eosinophilic esophagitis.



FAQS About Esophageal Strictures



Q1: What is an esophageal stricture?

A: It is a narrowing of the esophagus that makes swallowing difficult.

Q2: What causes esophageal strictures?

A: Common causes include acid reflux (GERD), eosinophilic esophagitis, injury from medications, or scarring after surgery.

Q3: What are the main symptoms?

A: Difficulty swallowing, food sticking in the chest, heartburn, regurgitation, and weight loss.

Q4: How are esophageal strictures treated?

A: Treatments include esophageal dilation, medications to control acid or inflammation, dietary adjustments, and, in severe cases, surgery.



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Take **Action**

If you experience **Esophageal Strictures**, don't ignore them. Early diagnosis and treatment can prevent complications. Schedule a consultation with GastroDoxs for expert guidance on managing your digestive health.

Visit [GastroDoxs.com](https://gastrodoxs.com) to schedule an appointment and access more resources on digestive health.

**Your health matters
take the next step
today!**

SCHEDULE AN APPOINTMENT

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