

Living with a Gastric Disorder

Some common digestive disorders, such as hiatus hernia, stomach ulcers and gastro-oesophageal reflux disorder, can cause heartburn or acid indigestion.

Most digestive problems are to do with lifestyle, the foods we have eaten or stress. Taking steps to change your lifestyle can help, and often prevent many of these problems.

Lifestyle changes that may help

- Eat little and often. You may find it helps to eat four or five smaller meals a day rather than three larger meals.
- Eat slowly and chew food well. This will prevent you from swallowing air which can cause discomfort, and will help you to digest your food better.
- Sit upright when eating, wear loose clothes, and avoid bending or lying down after meals. This may help to reduce the pressure on your stomach.
- Avoid eating late at night. Try to have your evening meal three or four hours before bedtime.
- If you have symptoms at night, try raising the head of the bed by four to eight inches. This can be done by placing sturdy objects under the bed, but make sure that this is safe before using. Do not use extra pillows to raise your head, as this may increase the pressure on your stomach.
- Foods such as tea, coffee, alcohol, chocolate, tomato, and spicy and fatty foods may irritate the stomach, particularly if you eat a lot of them. Try to avoid these foods if you notice they make your symptoms worse.
- Drink between meals rather than with them. This will prevent your stomach from becoming too full.

- If you are overweight, try to lose weight to help reduce the pressure on your stomach. Reduce portion sizes and cut down on fatty and sugary foods, and alcohol.
- Try to increase your physical activity, as this will help you to lose weight.
- Try to avoid and reduce stress by using relaxation techniques. You may find it helpful to sit and relax for a few minutes before and after meals.
- Avoid smoking, as smoke can irritate the digestive system and make symptoms worse.

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Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) if you require this leaflet in a different format, or would like to feedback your experience of the hospital. Email ruh-tr.PALS@nhs.net or telephone 01225 825656.