

# Understanding Esophageal Dilation

## What is an Esophageal Stricture?

The normal esophagus is a smooth tube that carries food from the mouth to the stomach. In some patients, the esophagus becomes narrowed somewhere along the way. These areas of narrowing are called strictures. Strictures give the opening in the esophagus an hourglass shape, and can make it hard for swallowed solids and/or liquids to enter the stomach. In some cases, a stricture can completely obstruct the esophagus.

## What Causes Esophageal Strictures?

Esophageal strictures can be benign or cancerous. Benign strictures can be due to acid reflux, a history of esophageal surgery, caustic ingestion (swallowing harmful chemicals), and other causes. Many people with benign esophageal strictures need to have their esophagus dilated to open it up. This stretching can help to make a stricture less severe or even go away.

## What is Balloon Dilation?

Balloon dilation is the most common means that physicians use to dilate an esophageal stricture. Using a flexible endoscope inserted into the patient's mouth and esophagus, a physician can pass a plastic catheter across the patient's esophageal stricture. The catheter is surrounded by a clear plastic balloon. When the balloon is filled with air or liquid, the balloon expands and stretches the stricture. These balloons are very strong and can dilate even firm strictures. Balloon dilations take only a few minutes to perform, but can cause lasting improvement in patients with

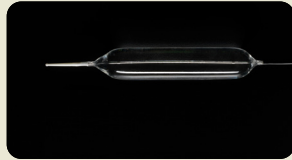
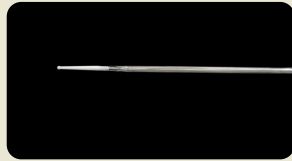
swallowing difficulties. Some patients only need to have one dilation; others need to have dilations performed periodically. In general, balloon dilation is used to treat benign esophageal strictures and is rarely used to treat cancerous strictures.

## What are the Risks of Esophageal Balloon Dilation?

Esophageal balloon dilation is generally a very safe procedure. Complications occur in only a small percentage of patients who undergo esophageal balloon dilation. Risks of esophageal balloon dilation include:

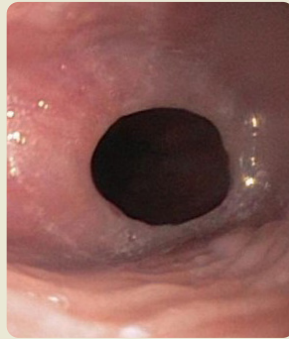
- **Bleeding.** Bleeding after an esophageal surgery is uncommon. Sometimes a small amount of bleeding does occur; this is usually not even noticed by the patient. Large amounts of blood loss from an esophageal balloon dilation are very rare.
- **A tear in the esophagus.** Sometimes during an esophageal balloon dilation the superficial lining of the esophagus experiences a tear. Usually this is not harmful and may suggest that the dilation will be more effective. Rarely, an esophageal balloon dilation can cause a deep tear in the esophagus. If this occurs, your doctor may be able to fix this during your endoscopic procedure. Rarely, a deep tear in the esophagus requires surgery to repair.

## ESOPHAGEAL STRICTURE SEQUENCE

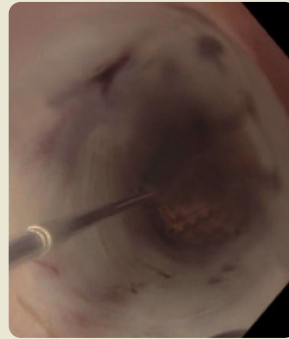


**Top image:** Prior to inflation, the small balloon catheter can pass through even very tight strictures.

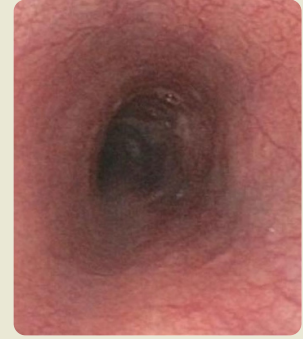
**Bottom image:** Inflated balloon used to dilate strictures.



Esophagus with a stricture



Esophagus during a balloon dilation



Healthy esophagus with no strictures

## What to Expect After You Have an Esophageal Dilatation

After your balloon dilation, your doctor will watch you for a period of time while you wake up from sedation. Most patients have no pain after undergoing an esophageal balloon dilation.

**You can typically resume normal daily activities and exercise, as well as eating and drinking the same day. Driving a vehicle, operating machinery, and making critical decisions should not occur within 24 hours after your procedure, or as defined by your medical provider.**

Some chest discomfort after an esophageal balloon dilation may occur, but this is usually mild and short lived (<24 hours). If you have severe pain or your ability to swallow does not improve (or worsens) tell your doctor.

Date of dilation treatment \_\_\_\_\_

Diameter of dilation treatment \_\_\_\_\_

Physician \_\_\_\_\_

Medical center \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number \_\_\_\_\_



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