

Oesophageal stricture

What is an oesophageal stricture?

An oesophageal stricture occurs when the oesophagus, also known as the food pipe, becomes narrowed. This can make it difficult or uncomfortable for food and liquids to pass through. At Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic, we specialise in diagnosing and treating oesophageal strictures, helping you manage your symptoms and improve your quality of life.

What causes an oesophageal stricture?

Oesophageal strictures usually develop because of long-term irritation or damage to the lining of the oesophagus. Common causes include:

- **Gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD)** acid reflux over time can lead to scarring and narrowing of the oesophagus
- **Barrett's oesophagus** a condition caused by long-term acid reflux, where the lining of the oesophagus changes and becomes more vulnerable to damage
- **Oesophagitis** inflammation of the oesophagus, often caused by reflux, infection, or certain medications
- **Radiation therapy** to the chest area, which can lead to scarring of the oesophagus
- **Ingestion of harmful substances** such as cleaning chemicals, which can cause burns and damage to the oesophagus
- **Tumours** benign (non-cancerous) or malignant (cancerous) growths can block or narrow the oesophagus

What are the symptoms of an oesophageal stricture?

The symptoms of an oesophageal stricture can vary depending on the severity of the narrowing. Common symptoms include:

- Difficulty swallowing (dysphagia), particularly with solid foods
- A sensation that food is stuck in your throat or chest
- Pain when swallowing (odynophagia)
- Regurgitation of food or liquids
- Unexplained weight loss due to difficulty eating
- Frequent heartburn or acid reflux

If you experience any of these symptoms, it's important to seek medical advice to determine the cause and prevent further complications.

When to seek urgent help

You should seek urgent medical attention if you experience:

- Inability to swallow food or liquids completely
- Vomiting blood or dark, coffee-ground-like material
- Severe chest pain or discomfort
- Sudden, significant weight loss

How is an oesophageal stricture diagnosed?

At Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic, we use advanced diagnostic tools to identify and assess oesophageal strictures. Tests may include:

- **Upper GI endoscopy** a thin, flexible tube with a camera is passed into your oesophagus to examine the narrowing and identify potential causes, such as scarring or growths
- **Barium swallow X-ray** you'll drink a contrast liquid, and X-rays will highlight the shape and size of the stricture
- **Biopsy** during an endoscopy, a small tissue sample may be taken to check for inflammation, infection, or cancer
- **CT or MRI scans** if further imaging is needed to assess the oesophagus and surrounding areas

How is an oesophageal stricture treated?

Treatment for an oesophageal stricture focuses on relieving symptoms, widening the oesophagus, and addressing the underlying cause. Common treatment options include:

- **Endoscopic dilation** this is the most common treatment for strictures. A balloon or specialised tool is gently inserted during an endoscopy to stretch and widen the narrowed area
- **Medications** if the stricture is caused by acid reflux, proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) or antacids may be prescribed to reduce stomach acid and prevent further damage

- **Stents** in some cases, a small tube (stent) may be placed in the oesophagus to keep it open
- **Surgery** rarely required, but it may be necessary for strictures caused by tumours or severe damage
- **Treatment of the underlying cause** addressing conditions like GORD, infections, or inflammation can help prevent the stricture from recurring

Your consultant will work with you to develop a personalised treatment plan based on your symptoms and the cause of the stricture.

Can oesophageal strictures be prevented?

While not all strictures can be prevented, certain steps may reduce your risk:

- Manage acid reflux or GORD with lifestyle changes and medications
- Avoid smoking and excessive alcohol consumption, which can irritate the oesophagus
- Follow your doctor's advice when taking medications that could harm the oesophagus
- Take care to avoid swallowing harmful substances

Why choose Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic?

At Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic, we specialise in diagnosing and treating oesophageal strictures using state-of-the-art technology and a patient-centred approach. Our experienced team provides accurate diagnoses and effective treatment options tailored to your needs, ensuring the best possible care.

Contact us

If you're having trouble swallowing or have concerns about an oesophageal stricture, contact Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic today to book your consultation. Early diagnosis and treatment can significantly