

A Q & A with Mr Majid Hashemi, Consultant Upper GI Surgeon at the Hospital of St John and Elizabeth. Majid is a specialist in the treatment of reflux and bariatrics.

Hi Majid, what kind of patients do you typically see with reflux or can it affect anyone?

Reflux can affect anyone, with an age range from 16 to 91, but mostly patients in the 30 - 60 year age range are the most common we see. They are often professionals who have been on long-term medication but are no longer feeling the right benefits, and more than half present with a hiatus hernia, which is where the stomach has started protruding up into the oesophagus.

I'm also seeing more patients with chronic coughs and adult-onset asthma caused by the reflux. Usually, they've had symptoms for many years and not been referred to a Consultant or have looked for further help because they've discovered that simple surgical treatment is available.

Following recent studies that have shown problems with long-term PPI use, what would you recommend as the most viable treatment for young people with chronic reflux?

Surgery. If the motility of the oesophagus is adequate I would recommend treatment using the LINX® Reflux Management System, which is a band of magnets that is implanted, through keyhole surgery, around the top of the stomach to close the valve, preventing reflux. If not, I would suggest a hiatus hernia repair and fundoplication surgery, which involves wrapping the top of the stomach around the valve to prevent further reflux.

Have you seen a rise in younger people with chronic reflux, perhaps due to weight, poor diet, or poor lifestyle choices?

Yes - we're seeing younger sufferers who are heavier in weight and tend to be leading more stressful lifestyles. Sometimes lifestyle changes can provide the relief needed however if the problem is mechanical, these changes can only go part of the way in correcting reflux and its sequelae. A hiatus hernia, for example, is an anatomical defect that does not resolve even with lifestyle adjustment.

What would you advise someone who regularly suffers from indigestion? Is this likely to cause long-term damage if left untreated, or if treated only with over-the-counter medication?

I would recommend seeing a GP and asking to be referred to a GI Consultant for a consultation. Long-term exposure to acid through reflux can affect the oesophagus directly leading the lining to become scarred. It can have a negative effect on the throat and even the voice and vocal chords. It can also affect your lungs and lead to irreversible changes, so it's important not to ignore the signs of reflux and indigestion.