Zenker’s Diverticulum

A Zenker’s Diverticulum is a pouch or pocket of tissue that develops in the back of the throat near the top of the esophagus (food tube). The esophagus is behind the trachea (breathing tube). The exact reason why this condition happens is unknown.

What are the symptoms of Zenker’s Diverticulum?

Symptoms may include the following:

- Trouble swallowing
- Regurgitation (food comes back up throat)
- Feeling like food gets stuck in your throat
- Coughing if food goes down the wrong way
- Lung infections if food or liquid goes into the lungs
- A lump in your neck that gurgles when touched
- Weight loss
- Bad breath

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

How is a Zenker’s Diverticulum diagnosed?
Your doctor may order tests to check for this condition. These tests may include the following:

- **Barium Swallow** - This test done in the radiology department to check the throat and esophagus. During the test, you will be asked to drink and swallow a liquid called barium. When you swallow the barium, x-ray pictures are taken to check how the barium moves through your esophagus.

- **Upper Endoscopy** - This test uses a thin flexible tube called an endoscope (scope). The scope is placed in your nose or mouth and passed down into your throat. The tube has a light and camera that lets your doctor see the back of your throat and esophagus.

How is a Zenker’s Diverticulum treated?
Surgery is the most common way to treat this condition. There are different types of surgery that may be used to fix this problem. The type of surgery depends on the size and location of the diverticulum. Your doctor will talk with you about which surgery is best for your situation.

- Risks of surgery may include infection, bleeding, a hole in the esophagus, chipped tooth (for procedures done through the mouth), or vocal cord weakness.
- Most people stay in the hospital one day after surgery. You can leave the hospital when you are able to eat and drink.
- After a zenker’s diverticulum is fixed, it may come back and surgery may be needed again.

The different types of surgery to fix a Zenker’s Diverticulum may include:

- **Endoscopic surgery** - During surgery, an endoscope (thin flexible tube with a light and camera) is placed in your mouth in the operating room. This surgery does not use incisions (cuts) on the outside of your body.

- **Neck Surgery** - During this type of surgery, an incision is made on your neck. You may have a scar on your neck from this type of surgery.