We value your feedback, and if there is anything we can do to help us serve our patients better, please let us know. Thank you for allowing us to be your care provider.
About Our Services
The Heartburn Center at St. Joseph’s Health is the first dedicated and comprehensive heartburn treatment center in the greater Syracuse region. This new center is located at Specialty Services inside the hospital. We help those who have occasional discomfort, experience a more significant array of symptoms and conditions, or those who may need surgery for symptom relief.

The Heartburn Center team works with you to help you understand your disease and the reasons behind your symptoms. We can recommend a full range of treatment options to manage or eliminate symptoms so that you can enjoy your life fully.

Should you need surgery, you will be surrounded by a team of experts in their field who are committed to your well-being and who will work in concert with other specialists and primary care providers as part of a coordinated treatment plan. Our medical team includes a gastroenterologist, robotics surgeon, bariatric surgeon, pulmonologist, dieticians, and psychology care providers.

Compassionate. Comprehensive. Coordinated Care.

About The Heartburn Center
The Heartburn Center at St. Joseph’s Health can provide any patient with a central one-stop location for the treatment of heartburn. The Heartburn Center is the right place for any individual with heartburn who believes that they can be served by a streamlined location. We can help those who have occasional discomfort or a more significant array of symptoms and those who may need surgery for symptom relief.

Everyone works together to address the disease, not just the symptoms. Should you be a candidate for surgery, The Heartburn Center staff can discuss a complete range of options, including the LINX implant procedure.

Treatment Options Can Include:
- Lifestyle modifications
- Smoking cessation
- Food and beverage choices
- Medications
- Weight loss
- Surgery

General Surgeons:
- Atul Maini, M.D.
- Balasubramaniam Sivakumar, M.D.

Gastroenterologists:
- Borys Buniak, M.D.
- John Sun, D.O.

The Heartburn Center has a complete team of physicians and other experts to diagnose and treat your condition as well as discuss and support your decisions. This team includes:
- Bariatric surgeon
- Pulmonologist
- Psychologist
- Dietician
- Gastroenterologist
- Robotics surgeon

About Our Services/Surgeons

Treatment Options Can Include:
- Lifestyle modifications
- Smoking cessation
- Food and beverage choices
- Medications
- Weight loss
- Surgery

Our compassionate, comprehensive specialized care at The Heartburn Center at St. Joseph’s Health can help you and your doctor choose the most appropriate course of treatment.
Approximately one-third of the U.S. population has Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD). This disease affects both women and men, leading to over 3 million ambulatory care and hospital visits per year. As many as 1,000 deaths per month in the USA are attributed to conditions associated with, and complications from, GERD.

The most common symptom of GERD is heartburn, although this is not the only symptom and not every case of heartburn can be diagnosed as GERD. However, this is a good place to start, especially if heartburn is experienced at least once every week. Over-the-counter medications can be helpful in treating occasional heartburn but doctors are noting a rapid increase in the numbers of GERD diagnoses. Oral medication is not necessarily being indicated for long-term treatment.

Many cases of GERD can be successfully treated with dietary and behavioral modifications alone with surgery as an additional option.

GERD and Heartburn Facts

Gastroesophageal Reflux (GER)
This happens when your stomach contents come back up into your esophagus. Stomach acid that touches the lining of your esophagus can cause heartburn, also called acid indigestion. This happens occasionally to almost everyone.

Barrett’s Esophagus
This is a condition where tissue similar to the intestine lining replaces the normal esophageal lining. GERD increases your chances of developing this condition. There are a number of different treatments for Barrett’s Esophagus. If left untreated, a rare cancer called esophageal adenocarcinoma may develop.

Barrett’s Esophagus

Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease
Symptoms such as heartburn that occur more than twice a week for several weeks could be a sign of GERD. This can lead to more serious conditions over time if left untreated.

You May Have GERD
Patients who are overweight, pregnant, smoke, take certain medications, or have a genetic predisposition may be more likely to develop GERD. Anyone may develop GERD for unknown reasons as well.

Complications of GERD
GERD can lead to other conditions, especially if left untreated. Some complications include inflammation in the esophagus, permanent difficulty swallowing, irritation of the throat and lungs, respiratory problems, and possibly cancer.

Complications of GERD
Esophageal pH monitoring is a procedure for measuring the reflux of acid from the stomach into the esophagus that occurs in GERD (pH measures the acidity or alkalinity of a solution). It is used to evaluate for GERD and to determine how medication is working to prevent acid reflux. It is also helpful in evaluating typical symptoms that do not respond to medications. Two different types of pH monitoring can be used. Your gastroenterologist will discuss which one is best for you.

Esophageal manometry is a test used to identify problems with movement and pressure in the esophagus that may lead to problems like heartburn. It measures the strength and muscle coordination of the esophagus during swallowing. The information obtained from this test can help doctors to identify esophageal problems. This test will allow the doctor to examine the muscular valve connecting the esophagus with the stomach, called the lower esophageal sphincter, as a factor in determining suitability for a LINX implant.

Several tests or examinations may be necessary to accurately diagnose a patient’s condition. Different procedures are considered under the general umbrella of an upper gastrointestinal (UGI) series that look at the upper and middle sections of the gastrointestinal tract. These tests can help find the cause of gastrointestinal symptoms and are normally performed on an outpatient basis.

Upper Endoscopy, also known as EGD (esophagogastroduodenoscopy), is a procedure used to view the esophagus, stomach, and part of the small bowel. This examination looks for signs of reflux, peptic ulcer disease, or tumors. It is one method in a patient’s treatment plan to determine the suitability of surgery. EGD is more accurate than X-rays for identifying inflammation, detecting abnormal growths such as ulcers, tumors, or cancer, and for examining the inside of the upper digestive system.

Barium Upper GI is a series of X-ray films that show the digestive tract. A liquid barium solution is swallowed while several X-ray films are taken. This temporarily coats the lining of the esophagus, stomach, and intestines, making the outline of these organs visible on the X-ray film. The X-rays show how the solution is traveling from the mouth to the esophagus and into the stomach. This is performed to visualize the presence of reflux, hiatal hernia or obstruction.
Surgical treatment is not the only option available in the treatment of chronic heartburn and/or GERD. Other options may include various lifestyle changes and medication therapy. Our medical team can advise you about which options may be right for your situation.

**Treatment Options**

**Lifestyle Changes:**
In many cases, simple changes to daily life are all that is needed to treat GERD. These changes can include daily dosages of over-the-counter or prescription medications. Additionally, your doctor may recommend reducing or eliminating smoking, alcohol consumption, fatty foods, and carbonated beverages. Weight loss may be another recommendation as well as alteration of eating or sleeping patterns.

**Medication Therapy:**
This is often the next step if the lifestyle changes are not effective in treating symptoms. Over-the-counter antacids and other medications can neutralize stomach acids and help reduce acid production. Prescription medications may be more effective in promoting healing and relieving symptoms.

**Surgery:**
This step is usually reserved for those whose symptoms are not effectively treated by either lifestyle changes or medication. Sometimes this may be the first option if there is a physiological defect such as a hiatal hernia. While the most common surgical option is a fundoplication surgery, at The Heartburn Center at St. Joseph’s Health we offer the state-of-the-art LINX implant as well. Surgical treatment is usually laparoscopic/robotic (small incision) with a rapid recovery to full activity.

**Hiatal Hernia Repair and Fundoplication**
A hiatal hernia occurs when the upper part of the stomach moves into the chest through a small natural opening in the diaphragm. This can cause a life-threatening loss of blood supply to the stomach. Surgical repair involves tightening the diaphragm opening and wrapping the upper stomach around the esophagus using stitches in both areas. This prevents acids and food from flowing into the esophagus.

**LINX Procedure**
The LINX implant helps to strengthen and reinforce the valve between the esophagus and the stomach. It is a small device about the size of a quarter, made of permanent magnets surrounded by titanium beads. LINX is implanted through a minimally invasive laparoscopic/robotic procedure around the esophagus, where it connects to the stomach. It is designed to restore your natural reflux barrier and full normal physiological function is preserved. LINX is removable should the need arise for other treatment options. At this time The Heartburn Center at St. Joseph’s Health is the only facility in Central New York to offer this state-of-the-art procedure.

**Surgical Options**
The services offered at The Heartburn Center at St. Joseph’s Health includes the discussion of surgical options for the relief and treatment of reflux and GERD. These options are explored on an individual basis with those patients who may have already tried other methods of relief.

8 9
The LINX Implant Procedure is a state-of-the-art surgical treatment for heartburn and/or GERD. The LINX implant helps to strengthen and reinforce the valve between the esophagus and the stomach. This stops acid from entering the esophagus easily. LINX is a treatment intended for patients diagnosed with GERD who continue to have symptoms even while taking medication. The Heartburn Center at St. Joseph’s Health is the only facility in Central New York to offer this procedure.

LINX is a small device made of permanent magnets surrounded by titanium beads and is about the size of a quarter. It is implanted around the esophagus where it connects to the stomach through a simple minimally invasive laparoscopic/robotic procedure. It is designed to restore your natural reflux barrier. There is no alteration of the stomach necessary.

LINX is constructed so that full normal physiological function is preserved. After a brief healing period, a patient can return to their normal diet as soon as this can be tolerated. Typical physical activity can be resumed quickly, usually within a few days.

Additionally, LINX is designed to preserve the ability to belch or vomit if necessary. It is removable should the need arise for other treatment options.

Designed for everyday life, the LINX device will not affect airport security. Two models of the device will allow you to have an MRI. You should discuss the MRI scanning options with your doctor while you are considering this surgical treatment.