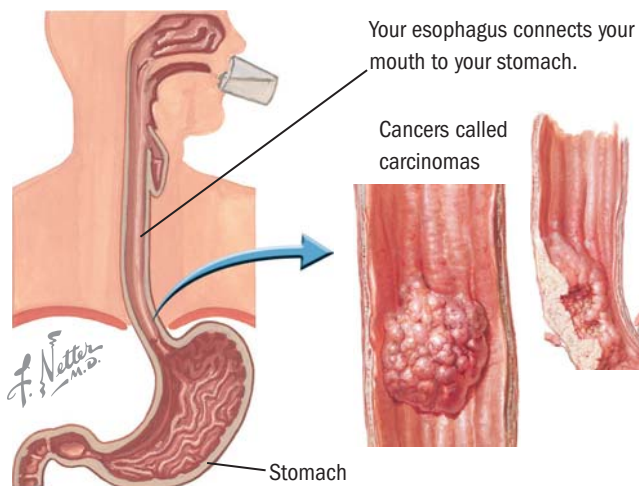


MANAGING YOUR ESOPHAGEAL CANCER



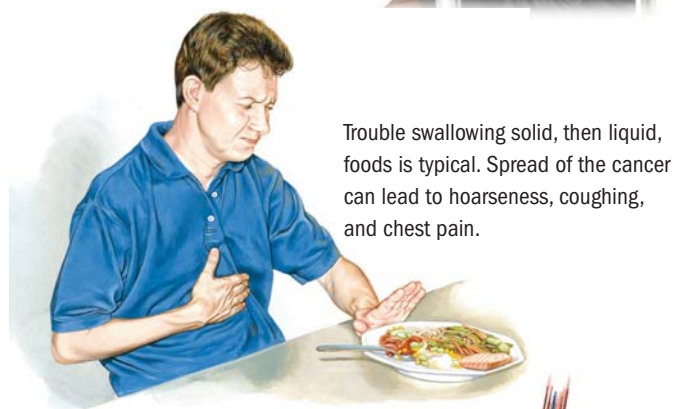
Your esophagus connects your mouth to your stomach.

Cancers called carcinomas

Stomach

Esophageal cancer is a malignant tumor of the esophagus. Most of these cancers occur in the lower portion of esophagus.

The cause isn't known, but risk factors include heavy alcohol and tobacco use.



Trouble swallowing solid, then liquid, foods is typical. Spread of the cancer can lead to hoarseness, coughing, and chest pain.

The best way for your doctor to make a diagnosis is to get biopsy tissue with an endoscope. Staging is needed to tell the extent of disease and whether it spread.



What Is Esophageal Cancer?

The esophagus is the part of the digestive tract that connects the mouth with the stomach. Esophageal cancer is a cancerous (malignant) tumor of this tube. Most of these cancers occur in the lower part of the esophagus. More than 10,000 new cases are diagnosed in the United States every year.

What Causes Esophageal Cancer?

The cause is unknown. Certain risk factors, such as heavy alcohol and tobacco use, increase the chances of getting this cancer. It isn't contagious. Acid reflux from the stomach that occurs for a long time can lead to changes in the lining of the esophagus (Barrett's esophagus), which can, in some cases, lead to esophageal cancer.

What Are the Symptoms of Esophageal Cancer?

Trouble swallowing solid foods is the usual symptom. As the tumor grows, liquids become hard to swallow, and pain with swallowing can occur. Cancer usually spreads nearby, to lungs, windpipe, lymph glands, and liver. Hoarseness, coughing, coughing up or vomiting blood, and chest pain can result.

How Is Esophageal Cancer Diagnosed?

The best way for the doctor to make a diagnosis is with an endoscope and biopsy. With this lighted tube, passed through the mouth into the esophagus, the doctor can get tissue to study with a microscope. X-ray studies, a barium swallow examination or esophagography, can also be done.

After diagnosis, staging is needed to tell the extent of disease and whether it spread. A physical examination, blood tests, and computed tomography (CT) of the chest and abdomen are used. Spread to the voice box (larynx) is checked with laryngoscopy. Spread to the lungs may also be checked with bronchoscopy. These examinations use lighted tubes passed into the larynx or lungs.



You may need a medical team for treatment, including an oncologist, surgeon, and nutritionist. Don't be afraid to seek second opinions.



Therapy depends on the stage of disease and its spread. It can include surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy.



Tell your doctor if swallowing is painful or difficult.

How Is Esophageal Cancer Treated?

Therapy depends on the stage of disease and its spread. It can include surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy (cancer-fighting drugs). In an operation called esophagectomy, the surgeon removes the cancerous part of the esophagus and lymph glands. Radiation is used instead of surgery when the tumor is too large to remove or the person cannot undergo an operation. Chemotherapy can be used with radiation and surgery.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Esophageal Cancer:

- ✓ **DO** treat chronic acid reflux to avoid precancerous conditions such as Barrett's esophagus.
- ✓ **DO** ask about your prognosis. This cancer is hard to cure.
- ✓ **DO** understand that nutrition is important before and after the operation. Eat high-calorie foods and nutritional supplements. A nutritionist (diet specialist) can help.
- ✓ **DO** ask for help from support groups.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if you have pain with swallowing, trouble swallowing, or food getting stuck when eating.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if you cough up or vomit blood.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if you have shortness of breath and fever.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if you cannot eat and continue to lose weight.

- ⊗ **DON'T** smoke.
- ⊗ **DON'T** drink alcohol in excess.
- ⊗ **DON'T** miss follow-up appointments, such as with your primary care doctor, surgeon, and oncologist (cancer specialist).

FROM THE DESK OF

NOTES

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following sources:

- National Cancer Institute
Tel: (800) 422-6237
Website: <http://www.cancer.gov>
- American Cancer Society
Tel: (800) 227-2345
Website: <http://www.cancer.org>