

Esophageal Cancer



KANAKIA
Health Care

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What is the esophagus?

The esophagus is a 10 inch long, hollow, muscular tube that connects the throat to the stomach. The muscles contract and push food and liquid toward the stomach.

What is esophageal cancer?

The cells that line the esophagus change or mutate, and they grow and divide uncontrollably to form a tumor. There are two main types of esophageal cancer based on the type of cell involved:

- Squamous cell carcinoma – begins in flat cells that line the inner surface of the esophagus. It usually occurs in the middle part of the esophagus
- Adenocarcinoma – begins in the cells of mucus secreting glands in the esophagus. It usually occurs in the lower part of the esophagus

Other rare types include choriocarcinoma, lymphoma, melanoma, sarcoma and small cell cancer.

What are the risk factors for esophageal cancer?

Though the cause of esophageal cancer is not known, there are known risk factors that include:

- Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)
- Tobacco use in any form
- Barrett's esophagus (precancerous changes in the cells of the esophagus)
- Heavy alcohol drinking
- Drinking very hot liquids

- Eating few fruits and vegetables
- Obesity
- Esophageal burns
- Human papillomavirus (HPV)
- Old age
- Male gender
- Achalasia, a motility disease of the esophagus where it does not contract properly
- Certain unusual foods e.g. betel nuts

What are the symptoms of esophageal cancer?

Esophageal cancer generally has no symptoms till it grows big enough to make the passage of food difficult. The following symptoms may be present, which can also be caused by a medical condition that is not cancer:

- Dysphagia or difficulty in swallowing food, and later liquids also
- Unexplained weight loss
- Pressure or burning in chest
- Indigestion or heartburn
- Coughing or hoarseness
- Vomiting
- Hematemesis (blood in vomit) or black, tarry stools
- Weakness due to anemia

How is esophageal cancer diagnosed?

The following tests may be done to diagnose esophageal cancer:

- Barium swallow
- Upper endoscopy
- Endoscopic ultrasound
- Bronchoscopy
- Biopsy

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- Molecular testing of tumor to decide treatment option e.g. HER2 testing
 - Computed tomography (CT) scan
 - Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)
 - Positron emission tomography (PET) scan
- Laparoscopy and/or thoracoscopy may be done for staging.

- Esophagogastrectomy – removal of a part of the esophagus and upper part of stomach
- Palliative surgery – gastrostomy or jejunostomy where a feeding tube is placed through the skin into the stomach or small intestine
- Endoscopic therapy
 - Removal of tumor
 - Dilation
 - Stent placement
 - Photodynamic therapy
 - Electrocoagulation
 - Cryotherapy
- Radiation therapy
- Chemotherapy
- Targeted therapy

What are the stages of esophageal cancer?

The stages of esophageal cancer are:

- Stage I - This cancer occurs in the superficial layers of cells lining your esophagus.
- Stage II - The cancer has invaded deeper layers of your esophagus lining and may have spread to nearby lymph nodes.
- Stage III - The cancer has spread to the deepest layers of the wall of your esophagus and to nearby tissues or lymph nodes.
- Stage IV - The cancer has spread to other parts of your body.

What is the treatment for esophageal cancer?

The treatment is individualized according to the patient's situation, and depends on the stage and health of the patient. Generally the treatment is a combination of chemotherapy, radiation therapy and surgery.

- Surgery
 - Esophagectomy – removal of a part of the esophagus

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