



CANCER OF THE OESOPHAGUS

THE OESOPHAGUS

The oesophagus is in the chest. It's about 10 inches long. This organ is part of the digestive tract. Food moves from the mouth through the oesophagus to the stomach. The oesophagus is a muscular tube.

The wall of the oesophagus has several layers:

- **Inner layer or lining (mucosa):** The lining of the oesophagus is moist so that food can pass to the stomach.
- **Sub mucosa:** The glands in this layer make mucus. Mucus keeps the oesophagus moist.
- **Muscle layer:** The muscles push the food down to the stomach.
- **Outer layer:** The outer layer covers the oesophagus.

RISK FACTORS

Studies have found the following risk factors for oesophageal cancer:

- **Age 65 or older:** Age is the main risk factor for oesophageal cancer. The chance of getting this disease goes up as you get older.
- **Being male:** Men are more than three times as likely as women to develop oesophageal cancer.
- **Smoking:** People who smoke are more likely than people who don't smoke to develop oesophageal cancer.
- **Heavy drinking:** People who have more than 3 alcoholic drinks each day are more likely than people who don't drink to develop squamous cell carcinoma of the oesophagus.

Heavy drinkers who smoke are at a much higher risk than heavy drinkers who don't smoke. In other words, these two factors act together to increase the risk even more.

- **Diet:** Studies suggest that having a diet that's low in fruits and vegetables may increase the risk of oesophageal cancer. However, results from diet studies don't always agree, and more research is needed to better understand how diet affects the risk of developing oesophageal cancer.

People who smoke are more likely than people who don't smoke to develop oesophageal cancer.

- **Obesity:** Being obese increases the risk of adenocarcinoma of the oesophagus.
- **Acid reflux:** Acid reflux is the abnormal backward flow of stomach acid into the oesophagus. Reflux is very common. A symptom of reflux is heartburn, but some people don't have symptoms. The stomach acid can damage the tissue of the oesophagus. After many years of reflux, this tissue damage may lead to adenocarcinoma of the oesophagus in some people.



- **Barrett oesophagus:** Acid reflux may damage the oesophagus and over time cause a condition known as Barrett oesophagus. The cells in the lower part of the oesophagus are abnormal. Most people who have Barrett oesophagus don't know it. The presence of Barrett oesophagus increases the risk of adenocarcinoma of the oesophagus. It's a greater risk factor than acid reflux alone. Many other possible risk factors (such as smokeless tobacco) have been studied. Researchers continue to study these possible risk factors. Having a risk factor doesn't mean that a person will develop cancer of the oesophagus. Most people who have risk factors never develop oesophageal cancer.

SYMPTOMS

Early oesophageal cancer may not cause symptoms. As the cancer grows, the most common symptoms are:

- Food gets stuck in the oesophagus, and food may come back up
- Pain when swallowing
- Pain in the chest or back
- Weight loss
- Heartburn
- A hoarse voice or cough that doesn't go away within 2 weeks

These symptoms may be caused by oesophageal cancer or other health problems. If you have any of these symptoms, you should tell your doctor so that

problems can be diagnosed and treated as early as possible.

Excerpted with permission from:

What You Need To Know About Cancer Of The oesophagus, National Cancer Institute, No.08-1557 September 2008

Designed by: Adhouse Designers

Compiled and Edited by:
7th Sense Communications Ltd.

Sponsored and Printed By Colourprint Ltd.



Professional Design and Prints



A publication of Africa Cancer Foundation (ACF)

80 Cedar Close, Off Camphor Road

New Runda, Nairobi, Kenya

P.O Box 1114-00621, Village Market, Nairobi, Kenya

T: +254 20 802 2711 M: +254 704 154 350 / 788 263 358

info@africacancerfoundation.org

www.africacancerfoundation.org

Twitter: @africf