

ASCO ANSWERS

ESOPHAGEAL CANCER

WHAT IS ESOPHAGEAL CANCER?

Esophageal cancer begins when cells that line the esophagus change and grow uncontrollably, forming a tumor. There are two main types of esophageal cancer. Squamous cell carcinoma develops in the upper and middle part of the esophagus. Adenocarcinoma begins in the glandular tissue in the lower part of the esophagus.

WHAT IS THE FUNCTION OF THE ESOPHAGUS?

The esophagus is a 10-inch long, hollow, muscular tube that connects the throat to the stomach. When a person swallows, the walls of the esophagus squeeze together to push food down into the stomach.

WHAT DOES STAGE MEAN?

The stage is a way of describing where the cancer is located, if or where it has spread, and whether it is affecting other parts of the body. There are five stages for esophageal cancer: stage 0 (zero) and stages I through IV (one through four). Find more information about these stages at www.cancer.net/esophageal.

HOW IS ESOPHAGEAL CANCER TREATED?

The treatment of esophageal cancer depends on the size and location of the tumor, the type of esophageal cancer, whether the cancer has spread, and the person's overall health. For cancer that has not spread beyond the esophagus and lymph nodes, doctors often recommend a combination of radiation therapy, chemotherapy, and surgery. The order of treatment varies, but chemotherapy and radiation therapy are commonly recommended before surgery, or for some people, instead of surgery.

Treatment for esophageal cancer that has spread to other parts of the body usually involves radiation therapy and chemotherapy, which is sometimes combined with targeted therapy. Surgery, radiation therapy, and other approaches can also help relieve pain or help patients eat. When making treatment decisions, people may also consider a clinical trial; talk with your doctor about all treatment options. The side effects of esophageal cancer treatment can often be prevented or managed with the help of your health care team. This is called supportive care and is an important part of the overall treatment plan.

HOW CAN I COPE WITH ESOPHAGEAL CANCER?

Absorbing the news of a cancer diagnosis and communicating with your doctor are key parts of the coping process. Seeking support, becoming organized, and considering a second opinion are other steps. Take care of yourself during this time. Understanding your emotions and those of people close to you can be helpful in managing the diagnosis, treatment, and healing process.

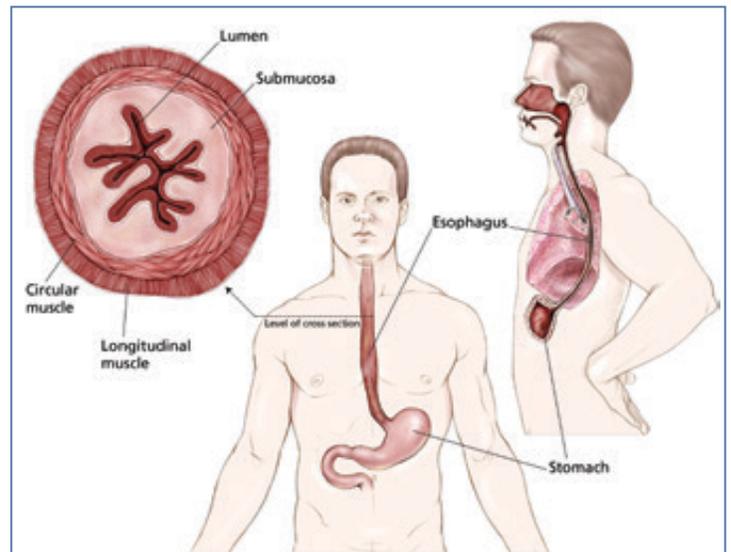


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Find additional cancer information at www.cancer.net.

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE DOCTOR

Regular communication is important in making informed decisions about your health care. Consider asking the following questions of your health care team:

- What type of esophageal cancer do I have?
- Can you explain my pathology report (laboratory test results) to me?
- What stage is the esophageal cancer? What does this mean?
- What is the prognosis?
- Would you explain my treatment options? What clinical trials are open to me?
- Which treatment plan do you recommend? Why?
- What is the goal of each treatment? Is it to eliminate the cancer, help me feel better, or both?
- Who will be part of my treatment team, and what does each member do?
- How will this treatment affect my daily life? Will I be able to work, exercise, and perform my usual activities?
- Will this treatment affect my ability to become pregnant or have children?
- What long-term side effects may be associated with my cancer treatment?
- If I'm worried about managing the costs related to my cancer care, who can help me with this concern?
- Where can I find emotional support for me and my family?
- Whom should I call for questions or problems?

Additional questions to ask the doctor can be found at www.cancer.net/esophageal.



Doctor-Approved Patient Information from ASCO[®]

For more information, visit ASCO's patient website, www.cancer.net, or call 888-651-3038.

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TERMS TO KNOW

Benign:

A tumor that is not cancerous

Biopsy:

Removal of a tissue sample that is then examined under a microscope to check for cancer cells

Chemotherapy:

The use of drugs to destroy cancer cells

Lymph node:

A tiny, bean-shaped organ that fights infection

Malignant:

A tumor that is cancerous

Metastasis:

The spread of cancer from where it began to another part of the body

Oncologist:

A doctor who specializes in treating cancer

Prognosis:

Chance of recovery

Radiation therapy:

The use of high-energy x-rays to destroy cancer cells

Targeted therapy:

Treatment that targets specific genes or proteins that contribute to cancer growth

Tumor:

An abnormal growth of body tissue

Upper endoscopy:

A procedure to examine the esophagus using an endoscope (a thin, flexible tube with a light and video camera)