

ASCO ANSWERS

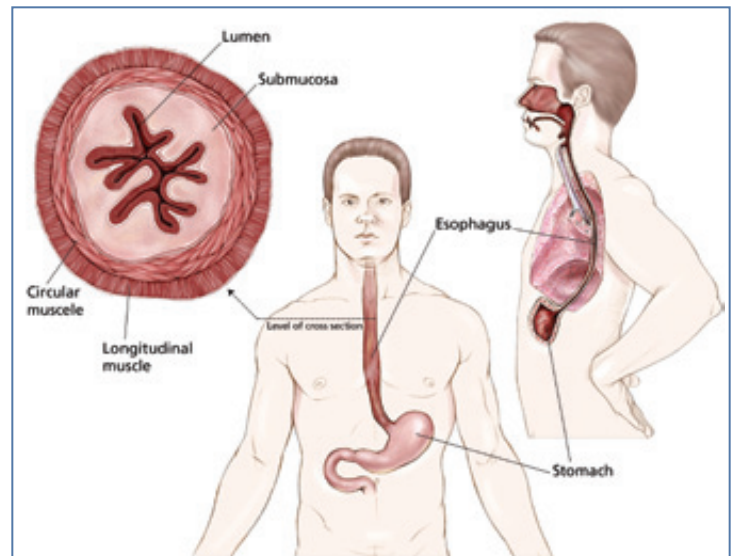
ESOPHAGEAL CANCER

WHAT IS ESOPHAGEAL CANCER?

Esophageal cancer begins when cells in the lining of the esophagus grow uncontrollably and eventually form 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. Rare cancers can also arise in neuroendocrine, muscle, or lymphatic tissue.

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 contract to push food down into the stomach.



Find additional cancer information at www.cancer.net.

WHAT DOES STAGE MEAN?

The stage is a way of describing the cancer, such as where it is located, if or where it has spread, and whether it is affecting the functions of other organs in the body. There are five stages for esophageal cancer: stage 0 (zero) and stages I through IV (one through four). Complete details on these stages are available 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 combining radiation therapy, chemotherapy, and surgery. The order of treatment varies, but chemotherapy and radiation therapy are commonly recommended before surgery, or, in some cases, instead of surgery.

Treatment for esophageal cancer that has spread usually involves chemotherapy and radiation therapy. Surgery and radiation therapy 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.

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.

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE DOCTOR

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

- 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 is my prognosis?
- Would you explain my treatment options? What clinical trials are open to me?
- Which treatment, or combination of treatments, do you recommend? Why?
- What is the goal of each treatment?
- Who is part of the 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?
- If I'm worried about the cost related to my cancer care, who can help me with these concerns?
- Will this treatment affect my ability to become pregnant or have children?
- What long-term side effects may be associated with my cancer treatment?
- Where can I find emotional support for me and my family?
- Whom do 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

Endoscopic ultrasound:

A procedure using sound waves to provide a picture of the esophagus

Lymph node:

A tiny, bean-shaped organ that fights infection

Malignant:

A tumor that is cancerous

Metastasis:

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

Oncologist:

A doctor who specializes in treating people with cancer

Prognosis:

Chance of recovery

Radiation therapy:

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

Tumor:

An abnormal growth of body tissue

Upper endoscopy:

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