Printed September 2, 2014 from http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/esophageal-cancer/overview

Esophageal Cancer - Overview [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the Cancer.Net Editorial Board [2], 10/2013

ON THIS PAGE: You will find some basic information about this disease and the parts of the body it may affect. This is the first page of Cancer.Net?s Guide to Esophageal Cancer. To see other pages, use the menu on the side of your screen. Think of that menu as a roadmap to this full guide.

About the esophagus

The esophagus is a 10-inch long, hollow, muscular tube that connects the throat to the stomach. It is part of a person?s gastrointestinal (GI) tract. When a person swallows, the walls of the esophagus squeeze together to push food down into the stomach.

About esophageal cancer

Cancer begins when normal cells change and grow uncontrollably, forming a mass called a tumor. A tumor can be benign (noncancerous) or malignant (cancerous, meaning it can spread to other parts of the body). Esophageal cancer, also called esophagus cancer, begins in the cells that line the esophagus.

Specifically, cancer of the esophagus begins in the inner layer of the esophageal wall and grows outward. If it spreads through the esophageal wall, it can travel to lymph nodes (the tiny, bean-shaped organs that help fight infection), blood vessels in the chest, and other nearby organs. Esophageal cancer can also spread to the lungs, liver, stomach, and other parts of the body.

There are two major types of esophageal cancer:

- Squamous cell carcinoma. This type of esophageal cancer starts in squamous cells that line the esophagus. It usually develops in the upper and middle part of the esophagus.
- Adenocarcinoma. This type begins in the glandular tissue in the lower part of the esophagus where the esophagus and the stomach come together.

Treatment is similar for both of these types of esophageal cancer. Other, very rare tumors of the esophagus (less than 1% of esophageal cancers) include small cell neuroendocrine cancers [3], lymphomas [4], and sarcoma [5].

Looking for More of an Overview?

If you would like additional introductory information, explore this related item. Please note this link takes you to another section on Cancer.Net:

- *ASCO Answers* Fact Sheet [6]: Read a one-page fact sheet (available in PDF) that offers an easy-to-print introduction to this type of cancer.

To continue reading this guide, use the menu on the side of your screen to select another section.

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/esophageal-cancer/overview
[2] http://www.cancer.net/about-us
[3] http://www.cancer.net/node/19437
[4] http://www.cancer.net/node/19207
[5] http://www.cancer.net/node/19604
[6] http://www.cancer.net/sites/cancer.net/files/asco_answers_esophageal.pdf