

Care Gram

Esophagitis

What Is Esophagitis?

The esophagus is the tube that carries food and liquid from the mouth to the stomach. The stomach digests the food with a strong acid to break down the food. When stomach acid backs up (a condition called reflux) into the esophagus, the tissues may become red and swollen. This swelling and redness are known as esophagitis. When the swelling and redness is severe, ulcers (sores) may develop in the esophagus.

Signs and Symptoms

You may have a burning in the lower chest that may be felt up in the esophagus. At times, bitter-tasting liquid may back up into the mouth. When esophagitis is severe and ulcers are present, you may experience pain when swallowing food. Esophagitis may also cause bleeding. Signs of bleeding include black stools, anemia (low red blood cell count), and vomiting with blood.

How Is Esophagitis Diagnosed?

To diagnose esophagitis, your doctor may order an upper GI series X-ray to outline the esophagus and/or an upper endoscopy procedure. An endoscopy is done by placing a small, flexible, lighted camera in your esophagus to allow the doctor to see the narrowed area. Endoscopy is done under sedation.

What Is the Treatment for Esophagitis?

Here are some things you can do to help ease your symptoms:

- Eat smaller bites.
- Chew food well.
- Eat smaller, more frequent meals.
- Do not eat for 2 hours prior to going to bed.
- Reduce excessive bending, lifting, abdominal exercise, girdles, and tight belts, as such increases abdominal pressure and causes reflux.
- Limit use of nicotine, fatty food, alcohol, coffee, chocolate, and peppermint.
- Lift the head of your bed 8-10 inches by a wedge or block under the upper part of the mattress. Pillows alone are not helpful.
- Take antacids 30 to 60 minutes after eating and at bedtime for temporary relief. Liquids are preferred to tablets.
- Medicines can be prescribed by your doctor to treat esophagitis. These include medicines to:
 - Reduce or stop the secretion of stomach acid
 - Strengthen the LES muscle

This Care Gram is for information purposes only. It may become out-of-date over time. Ask a doctor or a healthcare professional about your specific condition.



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