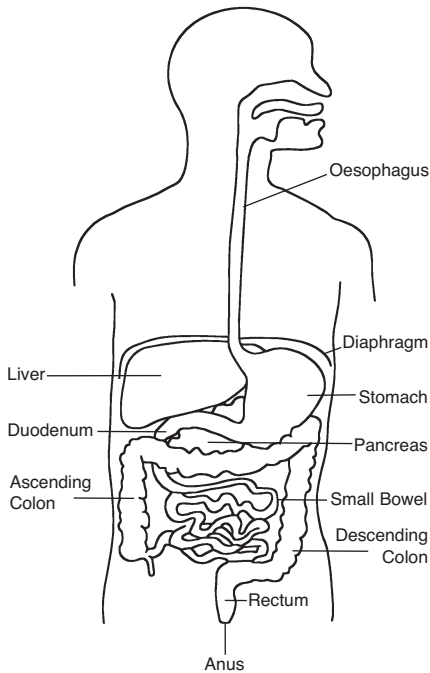




# Oesophageal Cancer



## What is the oesophagus?

The oesophagus or food pipe is part of the digestive system. Sometimes known as the gullet, it is the tube that carries the food from your mouth to your stomach. At the lower end of the oesophagus there is a muscular valve, sphincter, which prevents the food and fluid being pushed upwards from the stomach

## Cancer of the oesophagus

Cancer of the oesophagus develops from the lining of the gullet and has the effect of narrowing the oesophagus and causing difficulty in swallowing, first food then liquids. There are two main types of oesophageal cancer

- Squamous cell carcinoma which develops in the cells that line the oesophagus
- Adenocarcinoma develops in the glandular cells

## Causes

The following factors are potential risk factors and affect a person's chance of developing oesophageal cancer.

- Most common after the age of 50
- More common in men than women, nearly twice.
- Smoking — risk increases the longer a person smokes
- Alcohol — heavy drinking increases the risk — and the combination of drinking and smoking results in a higher risk.
- Diet — diets poor in fruit and vegetables as well as some vitamins and minerals
- Obesity — roughly doubles the risk of adenocarcinoma of the oesophagus probably because obese people are most likely to suffer from acid reflux.

## Acid reflux — Barrett's oesophagus

Acid reflux is where the stomach acid flows back into the oesophagus. As a result changes can occur in the cells that line the oesophagus and there is some evidence that this can cause a very slight increase in cancer risk.

Barrett's reflux is a long-term problem with reflux. A small proportion of people with Barrett's oesophagus go on to develop adenocarcinoma.

## Long-term exposure to some pollutants

Workers in some industries who are exposed to certain chemicals over long periods, such as soot, dye, and diesel exhaust are at increased risk.

## Signs & Symptoms

- Difficulty in swallowing
- Unexplained weight loss
- Pain or a burning sensation, as the food goes down the oesophagus
- Hoarseness or chronic cough
- Vomiting

These symptoms may well be due to reasons other than oesophageal cancer. However people who notice these symptoms should see their doctor, as the cancer may be easier to treat if detected early.

## Diagnosis

Following a doctors consultation, referral to a gastroenterology consultant will result in:-

- 1) Gastoscopy - a fine flexible tube passed down the oesophagus into the stomach, so that a good view is seen and biopsies may be taken to confirm the diagnosis with the laboratory.
- 2) CT Scan - a computerised scan to assess the spread of the cancer

## Treatments

Treatments for oesophageal cancer include:-

### **Surgery**

About one third of patients with oesophageal cancer are able to undergo "radical curative" surgery. This depends on the size of the cancer and which part of the oesophagus it is in and whether they are fit enough to have this surgery.

### **Radiotherapy**

Radiotherapy is sometimes given alone to treat oesophageal cancer or the symptoms it causes. Radiotherapy is sometimes combined with chemotherapy which is called chemoradiation. Chemoradiation is often used to treat squamous cell carcinoma in the upper third of the oesophagus.

### **Chemotherapy**

Chemotherapy is sometimes given before surgery to increase the success rate of the operation.

### **Supportive treatments**

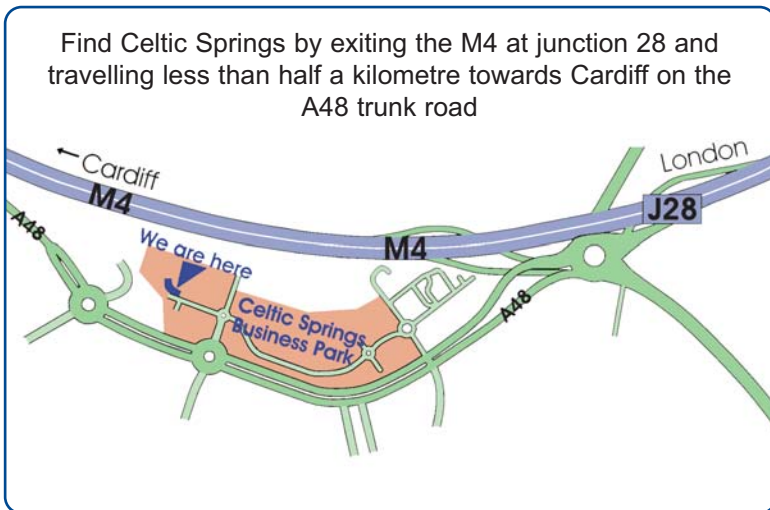
There are several treatments which can relieve symptoms associated with oesophageal cancer especially swallowing. If the cancer is blocking the inside of the oesophagus expandable wire tubes called "stents" can be put in place to open it up and make swallowing easier.

For further information:-

[www.cancerbackup.org.uk](http://www.cancerbackup.org.uk) - [www.corecharity.org.uk](http://www.corecharity.org.uk)

This fact sheet was designed to help you. Please do not hesitate to ask any questions of our specialists and nurses.

If you have any problems following your procedure call Nucleus Healthcare during opening hours  
08:00 hrs. — 18:00 hrs.



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