



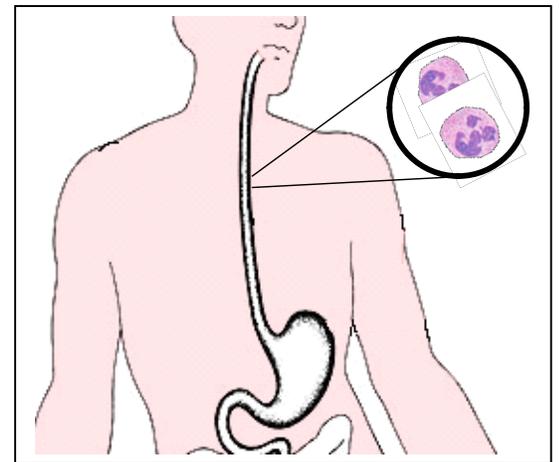
What is eosinophilic esophagitis?

Inflammation of the esophagus, termed *esophagitis*, can be caused by many different problems including infection, acid and chemicals. **Eosinophilic esophagitis** is a specific type of inflammation that occurs because of a white blood cell, the eosinophil (pronounced *ee-oh-SIN-oh-fill*). This type of cell is part of the immune system and is usually not found in the esophagus. When eosinophils accumulate in high levels in the esophagus, they can cause inflammation that attacks its lining.

Doctors have become more aware of eosinophilic esophagitis in the past decade. Many people have the problem for years without the correct diagnosis. More people are being diagnosed with this disease because of increased recognition, but this also may be because the disease is becoming more common. At this point, doctors think it occurs in about 2 in 10,000 people.

What are the symptoms of eosinophilic esophagitis?

One of the hallmarks of people with eosinophilic esophagitis is difficulty swallowing or occasionally getting food stuck. Some people have reflux that doesn't improve with typical medical therapy. Other symptoms can include abdominal pain, regurgitation, nausea or vomiting. In children, difficulty feeding and growth retardation may occur.



How do I know if I have eosinophilic esophagitis?

The only way to accurately diagnose eosinophilic esophagitis is to undergo an upper endoscopy. Sometimes the esophagus will show signs of inflammation and have linear grooves, white plaques, or a ring-like appearance. Often, however, the esophagus will look normal. Therefore, biopsies must be performed so that a pathologist can identify the number of eosinophils present.

What causes eosinophilic esophagitis?

Eosinophils often become activated during allergic reactions. People with hay fever, eczema and food allergies are more likely to have eosinophilic esophagitis. Therefore, most experts believe that this disorder is caused by exposure to some foreign particle. This allergy-causing particle, or "allergen," may come from food, from pollens in the air or even from a previous infection. The allergen is likely different in different people.

There is also a genetic component. Scientists have found certain genes that are more common in people with eosinophilic esophagitis. The disease appears to be more common in white men, but it can occur in any race and either sex. Many questions about the cause of eosinophilic esophagitis exist and more research needs to be done.

What is the treatment for eosinophilic esophagitis?

The first step to treating eosinophilic esophagitis is to discover any potential allergens. This may involve seeing an allergist to find any food allergens. Unfortunately, sometimes food allergies cannot be discovered by an allergist. A food diary can be useful to see if any foods are associated with esophagus symptoms. Another method of discovering food allergies involves an elimination diet. Under the guidance of a gastroenterologist or allergist, certain foods including milk, eggs, nuts, shellfish, soy and wheat are eliminated from the diet. They are then introduced back to see if there is any dietary culprit.

New medications are being developed for eosinophilic esophagitis. Currently, the most common medications being used are acid suppression medications and anti-inflammation medications. Acid suppression medications can allow the esophagus to heal and, in some people, acid is the cause of the eosinophilic inflammation.

One type of anti-inflammation medication is corticosteroids. Because the types of corticosteroids used in eosinophilic esophagitis are aimed solely at the gastrointestinal tract, patients often do not have the typical side effects of corticosteroids, such as weight gain and mood changes.

Sometimes people with eosinophilic esophagitis develop narrowing in their esophagus. These esophageal “strictures” can be stretched wider during an upper endoscopy. This dilation must be done with care, because there is a risk of tearing or perforating the esophagus.

What is the long-term outcome for eosinophilic esophagitis?

Eosinophilic esophagitis is a chronic disease and usually will not go away without any of the treatments mentioned. If not treated, the esophagus can continue to scar. These scars will cause stiffening of the esophagus and strictures, resulting in a decline in its ability to do its job.

Where can I find more information about eosinophilic esophagitis?

Your gastroenterologist at the Portland Clinic is always happy to answer any questions you have about eosinophilic esophagitis. More information is also available at www.apfed.org through the American Partnership for Eosinophilic Disorder