

Eosinophilic Esophagitis (EE)

What is it?

Eosinophilic esophagitis (EE) is an allergic reaction that causes inflammation in the esophagus. The **esophagus** is the tube going from your mouth to your stomach. The inflammation can make the esophagus become more narrow and stiff. This can make swallowing difficult and make food get caught in your esophagus.

EE is becoming more commonly diagnosed in both children and adults. It's a chronic condition, meaning it doesn't go away completely. Symptoms can be controlled, but may recur from time to time.

What causes it?

People with EE have a large number of a certain type of white blood cells (**eosinophils**) in their esophagus. The reason this happens isn't exactly known. Most research suggests that it's an allergic reaction to certain types of proteins found in some foods. Many people with EE have a family history of other allergic reactions such as asthma, rhinitis, dermatitis, or food allergies.

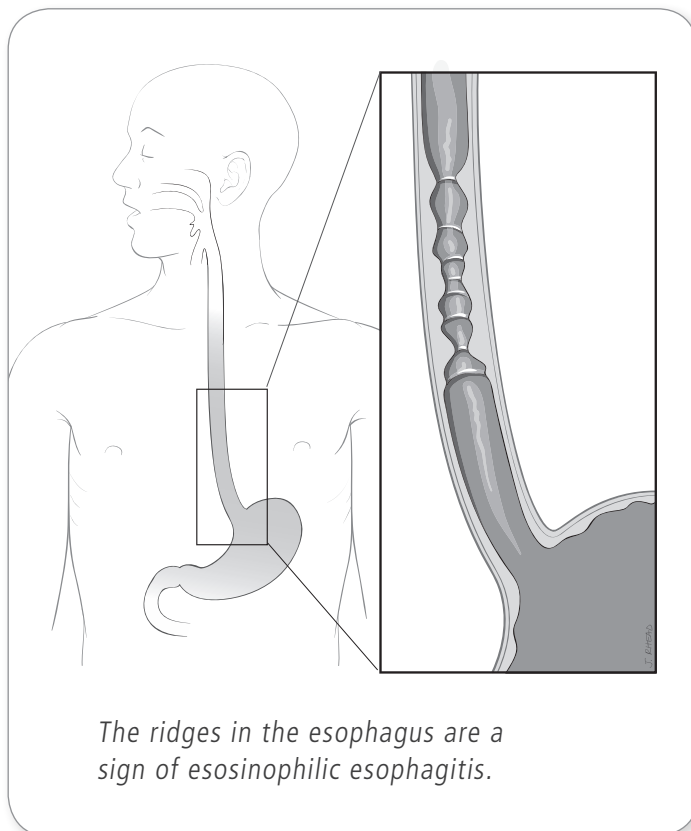
What are the symptoms?

The most common symptoms of EE are:

- Difficulty swallowing
- Pain when swallowing solid foods

Other symptoms include:

- Heartburn
- Vomiting (often during meals)
- Abdominal pain
- Chest pain
- Nausea
- Weight loss



How is it diagnosed?

The only way to know for certain if your symptoms are caused by EE is to do an endoscopy. During endoscopy the doctor inserts a thin, flexible tube with a light (an **endoscope**) into the esophagus. This allows the doctor to see inside and to take tissue samples (**biopsies**). The tissue samples can be tested for eosinophils and other signs of EE.

How is it treated?

Treatment of EE is directed at controlling symptoms and preventing complications. Your doctor may recommend one or more of the following:

- **Diet changes.** Your doctor may recommend you stop eating certain foods for a period of time. In some cases, this may mean stopping several foods, and then bringing one of them at a time back into your diet. This will help you know if that food is causing a reaction. Foods to eliminate may include milk, soy, egg, wheat, nuts or seafood.
- **Medication.** Your doctor may recommend medication to decrease stomach acid and inflammation. This may be done to see if your symptoms are caused by another illness, such as GERD.
- **Visit an allergy doctor.** Your doctor may recommend you visit a doctor who specializes in allergies. This doctor can help identify which foods you should stop eating.
- **Dilation.** If other treatments have been tried and not worked well enough, your doctor may recommend inserting a balloon-like device to gently dilate (stretch) the esophagus. This can allow food to pass through more easily.

Are there complications?

If EE is not treated or your symptoms are not controlled well, you may develop complications. These can include narrowed areas in your esophagus where food can get stuck. In rare cases, this can cause forceful vomiting. Repeated dilations may result in a tear of the esophagus, which would need immediate medical attention.

When should I call the doctor?

Contact your doctor if you experience any of the following:

- Difficulty or pain while swallowing that lasts more than a few days
- Difficulty or pain while swallowing, along with flu symptoms, such as headache, fever and muscle aches

Get emergency care if you have:

- Pain in your chest that lasts more than a few minutes
- Food is stuck in your esophagus that you can't get out

More resources

You may also be interested in the Intermountain Fact Sheet *Upper Endoscopy (EGD)*.

