

Barrett's Esophagus

What is Barrett's esophagus?

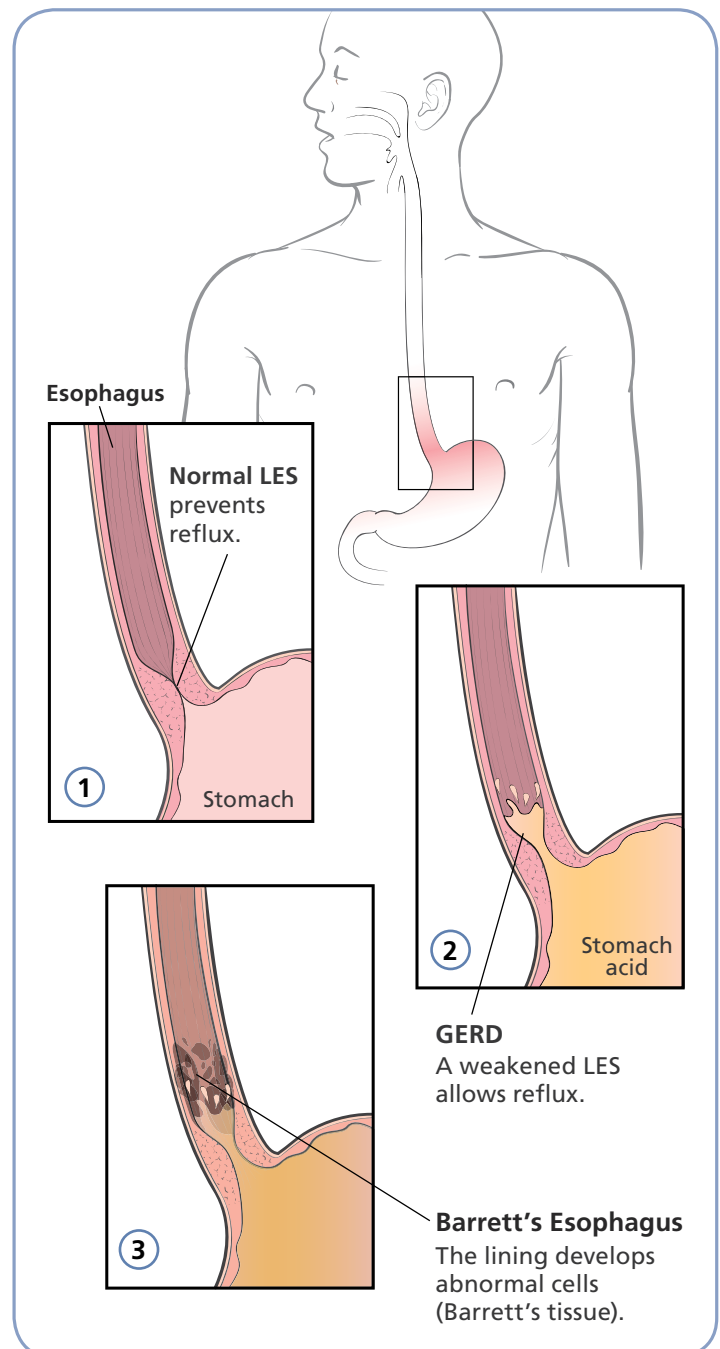
Barrett's esophagus [ih-SOF-uh-guhz] is a condition in which the lining of the esophagus is damaged. The esophagus is the tube that carries food from the mouth to the stomach. Abnormal cells lining the esophagus are called Barrett's tissue.

People with this condition are at greater risk for a type of cancer called an **adenocarcinoma** [ad-n-oh-kahr-suh-NOH-muh]. Although the risk is small, this cancer is often deadly.

What causes Barrett's esophagus?

Barrett's esophagus is most often caused by **gastroesophageal** [gas-troh-eh-sof-uh-GEE-uhl] **reflux disease (GERD)**. Here's how this happens:

- 1 Normally when food** goes down your esophagus and in to your stomach, it passes through a ring-shaped muscle called the **lower esophageal sphincter (LES)**. The LES lets food from the esophagus into the stomach and then closes behind it.
- 2 When the LES is not working properly**, food and stomach acid can move back up (reflux) into the esophagus and throat. This irritates the esophagus and causes heartburn, indigestion, and difficulty swallowing. When this condition continues, it becomes GERD.
- 3 If GERD lasts a long time**, it can change the lining of the esophagus and cause Barrett's esophagus. About 10 in every 100 people with GERD get Barrett's esophagus. It's most common in white males over 50, and it's uncommon in children. It's rare for people who don't have GERD to get Barrett's esophagus.



What are the symptoms?

Although it does not have its own symptoms, most people with Barrett's esophagus also have GERD. GERD causes ongoing heartburn, indigestion, and trouble swallowing. The only way to know if you have it is for your doctor to do a test called an **EGD**, or **esophagogastroduodenoscopy** [ih-SOF-uh-guh-gastroh-du-ahd den-OSS-kuh-pee]. This procedure allows the doctor to look at the inside of your esophagus and to take a tissue sample, if needed.

How is Barrett's esophagus treated?

- **Lifestyle changes.** These lifestyle changes won't reverse Barrett's esophagus, but they can help keep it from getting worse:
 - Don't lie down for 2 hours after eating.
 - Avoid alcohol, coffee, and smoking.
 - Avoid foods that cause heartburn.
 - Lose extra weight.
- **Medicine.** Acid-blocking medicines usually prescribed for GERD may help Barrett's esophagus. Be sure to take your medicines regularly and just as your doctor prescribes.
- **Wait and watch.** If your condition is not severe, your doctor may recommend that you have regular endoscopies to watch its progress. The doctor can take tissue samples during an EGD test to see if cancer is developing.
- **Procedures.** If the tissues of your esophagus are more damaged, your doctor may recommend a procedure to remove the Barrett's tissue. These treatments have not been proven to cure Barrett's esophagus permanently.
- **Surgery.** Sometimes the only way to treat Barrett's esophagus is to surgically remove part or all of the esophagus.

What if Barrett's esophagus goes untreated?

For some people, leaving Barrett's esophagus untreated will cause no additional problems. But for a few, Barrett's will lead to cancer of the esophagus. If the cancer is not caught early, it's often deadly.

If you have Barrett's esophagus, you should have a regular EGD test. Ask your doctor how often you should have one. Your condition may never turn into cancer. But if it does, catching it early will help your doctor treat it effectively.



When should I call my doctor?

Make an appointment with your doctor if you have ongoing symptoms of GERD:

- Frequent heartburn or chest pain, especially when lying down
- Trouble swallowing
- Sour-tasting fluid backing up into your mouth
- Coughing a lot
- Wheezing or hoarseness
- Symptoms that get worse when you eat, bend over, or lie down

Contact your doctor right away if you have these symptoms:

- Trouble swallowing
- Vomiting red blood or vomit that looks like coffee grounds
- Black, tarry, or bloody stools (poop)
- Unexpected weight loss

Intermountain Healthcare complies with applicable federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex. Se proveen servicios de interpretación gratis. Hable con un empleado para solicitarlo. 我們將根據您的需求提供免費的口譯服務。請找尋工作人員協助

© 2007 - 2017 Intermountain Healthcare. All rights reserved. The content presented here is for your information only. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice, and it should not be used to diagnose or treat a health problem or disease. Please consult your healthcare provider if you have any questions or concerns. More health information is available at intermountainhealthcare.org. Patient and Provider Publications FS005-03/17 (Last reviewed - 03/17) Also available in Spanish.