

Barrett's Esophagus

In people with GERD, the esophagus is repeatedly exposed to excessive amounts of stomach acid. Over time, if GERD is untreated complications can occur. About 1 in 10 patients with GERD are found to have a serious and pre-cancerous condition called Barrett's esophagus. It has the risk of transforming into cancer.

RISK FACTORS

There are a number of factors that increase the risk of developing Barrett's esophagus:

Age — Barrett's esophagus is most commonly diagnosed in middle-aged and older adults. Children can develop Barrett's esophagus, but rarely before the age of five years.

Gender — Men are more commonly diagnosed with Barrett's esophagus than women.

Lifestyle — Smokers are more commonly diagnosed with Barrett's esophagus than nonsmokers.

SYMPTOMS

Patients with Barrett's esophagus typically have symptoms similar to those produced by chronic GERD, such as heartburn and acid reflux symptoms. Some Barrett's esophagus patients may also suffer from other complications of GERD, such as esophageal ulceration and stricture. These facts are why it is important for patients with these symptoms to see their doctors regularly. Anyone experiencing these symptoms should not hesitate to make an appointment with Comprehensive Digestive Institute of Nevada.

DIAGNOSIS

An upper endoscopy procedure is needed to diagnose Barrett's esophagus.

Upper endoscopy — Upper endoscopy is a test that allows your doctor to see the inside of the esophagus and stomach. Before the test, you are sedated to prevent discomfort. The doctor will insert a thin lighted tube into the esophagus. The tube has a camera, which allows the doctor to see the lining of the esophagus.

Normally, the lining should appear pale and glossy; in a person with Barrett's esophagus, the lining appears pink or red and velvety. The doctor will remove a small sample of the lining (a biopsy) during the endoscopy so that it can be examined with a microscope for signs of Barrett's.

TREATMENT

Currently, there are no medications to reverse Barrett's esophagus. However, it appears that treating the underlying GERD may slow disease progression and prevent complications.

MONITORING

Barrett's esophagus requires regular monitoring by an expert doctor. While it is thought that controlling GERD reduces the risk of developing cancer, this has not yet been definitely proven.

Therefore, the doctor must perform regularly upper endoscopy procedure and to take biopsies to ensure disease stability.

SUMMARY

Barrett's esophagus is a condition that can develop in patients with chronic GERD. This is a pre-cancerous change that can potentially lead to the development of esophageal cancer. A regular program of endoscopic examination with biopsy is essential to monitor the disease progression. Doctors of Comprehensive Digestive Institute of Nevada are experts can diagnose and treat Barrett's esophagus. We utilize a multidisciplinary team approach to your healthcare, which means that patients benefit from the combined expertise of physicians who have the knowledge, perspective and experience to address all aspects of Barrett's esophagus to ensure a positive outcome.