

Esophageal Cancer

Esophageal cancer is a disease that occurs in the esophagus – a long tube that runs from your throat to your stomach which carries food and liquids to the stomach for digestion. The two most common types of esophageal cancer are squamous cell carcinoma and adenocarcinoma. Squamous cell carcinomas occur in the inside lining of the esophagus, often in the upper and middle portions, whereas adenocarcinomas begin in the glandular cells and occur in the lower esophagus near the stomach.

Statistics

- In 2021, approximately **19,260 new cases** of esophageal cancer are expected to be diagnosed in the United States.
- An estimated **15,530 Americans** will die from the disease in 2021.
- In Texas, an estimated **1,245 new esophageal cancer cases** were anticipated in 2020, and 986 Texans were expected to die from the disease.

Risk Factors

- **Age:** The risk of esophageal cancer increases with age, with the majority of people diagnosed over the age of 55.
- **Gender:** Men are three to four times more likely to develop esophageal cancer than women.
- **Race:** African Americans are two times more likely to develop squamous cell esophageal cancer.
- **Personal History:** People who have had lung, mouth, or throat cancer have a higher risk of esophageal cancer.
- **Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD):** People with a history of acid reflux have a slightly higher risk.
- **Barrett's Esophagus:** Barrett's esophagus results from long-term acid reflux. In this situation, the lining cells of the lower esophagus undergo a change to a glandular type of cell, and this change may result in a greater risk of developing adenocarcinoma.
- **Tobacco and Alcohol:** Both tobacco and alcohol significantly raise the risk of esophageal cancer. Together, the risk is much greater than either alone.
- **Obesity:** People who are overweight or obese have a higher risk of esophageal cancer, as this population is more likely to have gastroesophageal reflux.
- **Diet:** Although not proven, it has been suggested that a diet high in processed meat may increase risk of esophageal cancer, but a diet high in fruits and vegetables lowers the risk.
- **Esophageal Diseases and Injury:** People with achalasia, tylosis, Plummer-Vinson syndrome, and exposure to or injury from certain chemicals, such as lye, face a higher risk of esophageal cancer.

Symptoms and Signs

Esophageal cancer symptoms vary with each patient. People with any of these symptoms should consult their physician:

- Bone pain
- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Trouble swallowing, which gets worse over time
- Pain, pressure, or burning in chest
- Frequent choking on food or vomiting
- Hoarseness or chronic coughing
- Indigestion or heartburn
- Pain behind breastbone or in the throat
- Lump under the skin
- Bleeding in the esophagus

Tips for Prevention

For many, esophageal cancer can be prevented by maintaining a healthy lifestyle, including not using tobacco, limiting alcohol intake, eating a healthy diet, and maintaining an ideal weight. Texas Oncology recommends people with Barrett's esophagus get tested for signs of cancer. Preventing Barrett's esophagus and esophageal cancer may be possible by treating reflux. If you have chronic heartburn or reflux, you should contact your physician to discuss treatment.

Treatment

Treatment options for people with esophageal cancer include surgery, radiation therapy, proton therapy, chemotherapy, chemoradiation therapy, laser therapy, electrocoagulation, targeted therapy, immunotherapy, endoscopic treatments, palliative care, or a combination of these treatments. Esophageal cancer is often found at later stages and many treatments are aimed at relieving symptoms but cannot cure the cancer. Many doctors encourage patients to consider participating in a clinical trial.

About Texas Oncology

Texas Oncology is an independent private practice with more than 500 physicians and 210 locations across the state. Meeting the oncology needs of Texans for more than 35 years, the practice includes Texas Center for Proton Therapy, Texas Breast Specialists, Texas Oncology Surgical Specialists, Texas Urology Specialists, and Texas Center for Interventional Surgery. As a lead participant in US Oncology Research, Texas Oncology played a role in the development of more than 100 FDA-approved therapies. For more information, visit www.TexasOncology.com.

