

Diagnosing Oesophageal Cancer - A Quick Guide



Contents

This is a brief summary of the information on 'Diagnosing oesophageal cancer' from CancerHelp UK. You will find more detailed information on the website.

In this information there are sections on

- Tests for oesophageal cancer
- Further tests for oesophageal cancer
- Questions for your doctor

Tests for oesophageal cancer

You will usually see your family doctor first, who will ask you about your general health and your symptoms. Your doctor will perform a physical examination, which may involve feeling your abdomen and the lymph nodes in your neck and under your arms. Your doctor may refer you to hospital for tests and X-rays or send you directly to a specialist.

At the hospital

The specialist will ask you about your medical history and symptoms. They will examine you and may arrange for you to have some further tests. These may include blood tests and a chest X-ray to check your general health. Your specialist may also suggest an endoscopy (oesophagoscopy), a barium swallow, and further blood tests.

Endoscopy is the main test for cancer of the oesophagus these days. An endoscope is a long thin tube with a light and camera inside. It allows the doctor to look at the inside of the oesophagus either through an eye piece or on a video screen. The doctor will also take tissue samples (biopsies) of any abnormal looking areas.

Barium is a white, chalky liquid that you drink. A series of X-rays are taken as the barium passes down your throat and into your stomach. If there is a lump inside your oesophagus, this will show up on the X-ray.

Further tests for oesophageal cancer

If your tests show you have oesophageal cancer you may need further tests to see if the cancer has spread. Your doctor may call this 'staging' your cancer. Knowing the stage of your cancer helps your doctor to decide on the best treatment.

These tests may include an endoscopic ultrasound, MRI scan, PET-CT scan chest X-ray, blood tests, laparoscopy and an ultrasound scan of your liver.

Remember, having these tests does not mean your cancer has spread. Your doctor needs to rule out cancer spread to treat



you properly. You are bound to be nervous about all this. But try not to worry too much before you know all the facts.

After the tests

You will be asked to come back to the hospital when your test results have come through. This is bound to take a little time, even if only a few days. You are likely to feel anxious during this time. When you are waiting for results, it may help to talk to a close friend or relative about how you are feeling. Or you may want to contact a cancer support group to talk to someone who has been through a similar experience.

What to ask your doctor about tests for oesophageal cancer

- What tests are you going to do?
- What are you looking for?
- Will the tests show whether I have cancer?
- Will you know what treatment I need when you have the results?
- Will the tests show whether my cancer can be operated on?
- Are any of the tests painful?
- Do any of the tests have after effects?
- Can I have these tests as an outpatient?
- Should I bring someone with me when I have these tests?
- How long will the results take?
- Who will give me the test results?

More information

For more information about oesophageal cancer, visit our website <http://cancerhelp.cancerresearchuk.org>

You will find a wide range of detailed, up to date information for people affected by cancer, including a clinical trials database that you can search for trials in the UK. You can view or print the information in a larger size if you need to.

For answers to your questions about cancer call our Cancer Information Nurses on **0808 800 4040**
9am till 5pm Monday to Friday

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