

Diagnosing Oesophageal Cancer

A Quick Guide

Contents

This is a brief summary of the information on 'Diagnosing oesophageal cancer' from our website. You will find more detailed information on there. In this information there are sections on

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

You can view this information in a larger print on our website.

Tests for oesophageal cancer

You will usually see your family doctor (GP) 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) or a barium swallow, if you haven't had one already.

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. They will take tissue samples (biopsies) of any abnormal looking areas.

A barium swallow is a type of X-ray investigation. It is also called a barium meal. 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, CT scan, PET-CT scan, and laparoscopy.

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 week or so. You are likely to feel anxious during this time. When you are waiting for results, it may help to talk to your clinical nurse specialist or 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?
- How reliable are the tests?
- Do I have to do anything to prepare for the tests?
- Will you know what treatment I will need when you have the results?
- 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 and who will give them to me?

For more information, visit our website <http://www.cruk.org/about-cancer>

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. Our information is based on the best current scientific evidence and reviewed regularly by leading clinicians and experts in health and social care.

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

Adapted from Cancer Research UK's website in May 2014. Cancer Research UK's website is not designed to provide medical advice or professional services and is intended to be for educational use only. The information provided through Cancer Research UK's website and our nurse team is not a substitute for professional care and should not be used for diagnosing or treating a health problem or disease. If you have, or suspect you may have, a health problem you should consult your doctor. Copyright Cancer Research UK 2014. Cancer Research UK is a registered charity in England and Wales (1089464), Scotland (SC041666) and in the Isle of Man (1103)