

Achalasia

What is achalasia?

Achalasia is a rare condition that affects the oesophagus (food pipe), making it difficult for food and drink to pass from your mouth to your stomach. It happens when the muscles in the oesophagus do not work properly, and the lower oesophageal sphincter (LOS), a ring of muscle at the bottom of the oesophagus, does not relax as it should. This causes food and liquids to become stuck, leading to discomfort and other symptoms.

At Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic, we specialise in diagnosing and treating achalasia, helping you manage your symptoms and improve your quality of life.

What are the symptoms of achalasia?

Achalasia can cause a variety of symptoms, which often develop gradually. These may include:

- Difficulty swallowing (dysphagia), often with both solid foods and liquids
- A sensation of food getting stuck in your throat or chest
- Regurgitation of undigested food or fluids
- Chest pain or discomfort
- Persistent cough, especially at night
- Unexplained weight loss
- Frequent heartburn or acid reflux

If you are experiencing these symptoms, it's important to seek medical advice for an accurate diagnosis and appropriate treatment.

What causes achalasia?

The exact cause of achalasia is not fully understood, but it is thought to involve damage to the nerves in the oesophagus. This damage affects the muscles and prevents the LOS from relaxing properly. While the condition is not inherited, certain autoimmune conditions or infections may increase the risk of developing achalasia.

How is achalasia diagnosed?

At Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic, we use advanced diagnostic tools to confirm achalasia and assess its severity. Tests may include:

- **Upper GI endoscopy (gastroscopy):** A thin, flexible tube with a camera is used to examine your

oesophagus and rule out other conditions that could be causing your symptoms.

- **Oesophageal manometry:** This test measures the pressure in your oesophagus to check how well the muscles are working and confirm the diagnosis of achalasia.
- **Barium swallow:** You will drink a special liquid that highlights your oesophagus on an X-ray, helping to show how food and liquids are moving through.

How is achalasia treated?

There is no cure for achalasia, but treatment can relieve symptoms and improve your ability to swallow.

Options include:

- **Balloon dilatation:** A balloon is inserted into the oesophagus and gently inflated to stretch the LOS, allowing food and liquids to pass through more easily
- **Heller myotomy:** A surgical procedure that cuts the tight muscles of the LOS to improve swallowing. This can be performed using minimally invasive (keyhole) surgery
- **POEM (Peroral Endoscopic Myotomy):** A modern endoscopic procedure that uses a flexible camera to divide the LOS muscle without external incisions
- **Botox injections:** These relax the LOS temporarily, providing short-term symptom relief
- **Medications:** In some cases, drugs that relax the oesophagus muscles may be prescribed, though these are typically less effective than other treatments

Your consultant will discuss the best treatment option based on the severity of your condition and your personal preferences.

What happens after treatment?

After treatment, most people experience significant relief from symptoms. However, you may need ongoing care to manage any long-term effects, such as mild reflux. Dietary adjustments, such as eating smaller meals and avoiding lying down immediately after eating, can also help.

Why choose Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic?

At Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic, our team of experienced specialists provides comprehensive care for patients with achalasia. From accurate diagnosis using the latest technology to advanced treatment options, we are dedicated to helping you feel better and regain control of your digestive health.

Contact us

If you're having trouble swallowing or other symptoms of achalasia, contact Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic today to book a consultation. Early diagnosis and treatment can make a significant difference.