

Barrett's oesophagus

What is Barrett's oesophagus?

Barrett's oesophagus is a condition where the lining of your oesophagus (food pipe) changes, often due to long-term acid reflux or gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD). In this condition, the normal lining of the oesophagus is replaced by tissue similar to that found in the stomach or intestine. While Barrett's oesophagus itself doesn't cause symptoms, it is linked to GORD, which can cause issues like heartburn and regurgitation. Although it is not cancer, Barrett's oesophagus can increase the risk of developing oesophageal cancer over time.

What causes Barrett's oesophagus?

The main cause of Barrett's oesophagus is long-term acid reflux or GORD, where stomach acid flows back up into the oesophagus. This repeated exposure can damage the oesophageal lining, leading to the changes seen in Barrett's oesophagus. Factors that may increase your risk include:

- Having frequent or severe acid reflux
- Being overweight, particularly if you carry excess weight around your abdomen
- Smoking
- Having a family history of Barrett's oesophagus or oesophageal cancer

What are the symptoms of Barrett's oesophagus?

Barrett's oesophagus itself doesn't usually cause symptoms. However, most people with this condition experience symptoms of GORD, including:

- Persistent heartburn or a burning sensation in your chest
- Regurgitation of food or sour-tasting fluid
- Difficulty swallowing (dysphagia)
- Feeling like food is stuck in your throat

If you've had symptoms of GORD for a long time, it's important to speak to your doctor, as early diagnosis of Barrett's oesophagus can help reduce the risk of complications.

How is Barrett's oesophagus diagnosed?

Barrett's oesophagus is diagnosed using an **upper GI endoscopy**, a procedure where a thin, flexible tube with a camera is passed through your mouth into your oesophagus and stomach. During the procedure, your

doctor will:

- Examine the lining of your oesophagus for any changes
- Take small tissue samples (biopsies) to confirm the diagnosis and check for any abnormal cells (dysplasia)

Biopsies are essential to assess whether there are any precancerous changes, as these require closer monitoring or treatment.

What are the risks of Barrett's oesophagus?

Barrett's oesophagus is a risk factor for oesophageal cancer, but the likelihood of developing cancer is low. For most people, the risk is small, but regular monitoring is important to detect any changes early. If your biopsy shows abnormal cells (dysplasia), this can be treated to reduce the risk of cancer developing.

How is Barrett's oesophagus treated?

Treatment for Barrett's oesophagus focuses on managing acid reflux to prevent further damage to the oesophagus and reduce symptoms of GORD. This may include:

- **Medication:** Proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) are commonly prescribed to reduce stomach acid and help control symptoms
- **Lifestyle changes:** These can make a big difference in managing acid reflux and include:
 - Losing weight if you're overweight
 - Stopping smoking
 - Eating smaller, more frequent meals
 - Avoiding foods and drinks that trigger reflux, such as spicy foods, caffeine, and alcohol
 - Raising the head of your bed to prevent reflux at night

If biopsies show precancerous changes, treatments may include:

- **Endoscopic therapy:** This involves removing or destroying abnormal cells using techniques such as radiofrequency ablation or endoscopic mucosal resection
- **Surgery:** Rarely, surgery may be needed to remove part of the oesophagus if there is a high risk of cancer

How is Barrett's oesophagus monitored?

Regular endoscopies and biopsies are an essential part of managing Barrett's oesophagus. These help your doctor monitor the condition and detect any early changes that might need treatment. The frequency of monitoring depends on the results of your biopsies and your individual risk factors.

Why choose Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic?

At Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic, we provide expert care for Barrett's oesophagus, from accurate diagnosis to personalised treatment and long-term monitoring. Our state-of-the-art facilities and experienced specialists ensure you receive the highest standard of care in a comfortable environment.

Contact us

If you're experiencing persistent acid reflux or have been diagnosed with Barrett's oesophagus, contact Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic today to book your consultation. Early diagnosis and proactive management can help you take control of your health and reduce your risk of complications.