

Oesophageal cancer

What is oesophageal cancer?

Oesophageal cancer occurs when abnormal cells develop in the lining of your oesophagus (food pipe), which connects your throat to your stomach. It is a serious condition but can often be managed more effectively when detected early.

What causes oesophageal cancer?

Oesophageal cancer doesn't have a single cause but develops due to a combination of risk factors that damage the cells in the oesophagus. Common risk factors include:

- **Gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD)** frequent acid reflux can irritate the lining of your oesophagus over time
- **Barrett's oesophagus** a condition where long-term acid reflux causes changes in the cells lining the oesophagus
- **Smoking** increases the risk of oesophageal cancer significantly
- **Alcohol consumption** heavy drinking, particularly when combined with smoking
- **Obesity** linked to an increased risk of GORD and acid reflux
- **Diet** a diet low in fruits and vegetables may increase the risk
- **Age and gender** more common in people over 60 and men are at higher risk

There are two main types of oesophageal cancer:

- **Adenocarcinoma** often linked to acid reflux and obesity, it usually develops in the lower part of the oesophagus
- **Squamous cell carcinoma** linked to smoking and alcohol, it typically occurs in the upper or middle part of the oesophagus

What are the symptoms of oesophageal cancer?

Oesophageal cancer can develop gradually, and early symptoms may be mild or mistaken for other conditions. Common symptoms include:

- Difficulty swallowing (dysphagia), with a feeling that food is stuck in your throat or chest
- Persistent heartburn or acid reflux
- Unexplained weight loss
- Pain or discomfort in the chest or throat
- Hoarseness or a persistent cough
- Vomiting, particularly if there is blood present

- Dark or black stools, which may indicate internal bleeding

If you experience any of these symptoms, it's important to seek medical advice promptly, especially if they persist for more than a few weeks.

How is oesophageal cancer diagnosed?

At Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic, we use state-of-the-art diagnostic tools to detect oesophageal cancer as early as possible. Tests may include:

- **Upper GI Endoscopy** a thin, flexible tube with a camera is passed into your oesophagus to check for abnormalities or take tissue samples (biopsies)
- **Barium swallow X-ray** you'll drink a contrast liquid, and X-rays will highlight abnormalities in the oesophagus
- **CT or PET scans** imaging tests that provide detailed pictures of the oesophagus and surrounding areas to check for cancer spread
- **Endoscopic ultrasound (EUS)** combines endoscopy and ultrasound to assess the depth of cancer in the oesophageal wall and nearby lymph nodes

How is oesophageal cancer treated?

Treatment depends on the stage and type of oesophageal cancer as well as your overall health. Options may include:

- **Endoscopic treatments** for early-stage cancers, such as endoscopic mucosal resection (EMR) or radiofrequency ablation (RFA)
- **Surgery** to remove part or all of the oesophagus (oesophagectomy) and reconnect the digestive tract
- **Chemotherapy or radiotherapy** used alone or in combination to shrink tumours or destroy cancer cells
- **Targeted therapies or immunotherapy** advanced treatments that attack cancer cells more precisely

Your specialist will work with you to develop a personalised treatment plan, ensuring the best possible outcomes while supporting your quality of life.

How can oesophageal cancer be prevented?

While not all cases of oesophageal cancer are preventable, certain steps can reduce your risk:

- Manage acid reflux or GORD with lifestyle changes and medications
- Quit smoking and limit alcohol consumption
- Maintain a healthy weight and diet rich in fruits and vegetables
- Regular monitoring if you have Barrett's oesophagus or other risk factors

Why choose Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic?

At Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic, we are committed to providing expert diagnosis and compassionate care for oesophageal cancer. With our advanced technology and experienced team, we offer personalised care plans designed to meet your unique needs. Whether you need diagnostic tests or ongoing treatment, we're here to support you every step of the way.

Contact us

If you're experiencing symptoms related to oesophageal cancer or have any concerns about your digestive health, reach out to Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic today to schedule a consultation. Early diagnosis and care can make a significant difference to your health and well-being. Early detection and treatment can make a significant difference in outcomes and quality of life.