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ESPAÑOL

Achalasia



Achalasia is a disorder of the esophagus, the tube that carries food from the mouth to the stomach. This condition affects the ability of the esophagus to move food into the stomach.

Causes

There is a muscular ring at the point where the esophagus and stomach meet, called the lower esophageal sphincter. Normally, this muscle relaxes when you swallow. In people with achalasia, it does not relax as well. In addition, the normal muscle activity of the esophagus (peristalsis) is reduced.

This problem is caused by damage to the nerves of the esophagus.

Other problems can cause similar symptoms, such as cancer of the esophagus or upper stomach, and a parasite infection that causes [Chagas disease](#).

Achalasia is rare. It may occur at any age, but is most common in middle-aged or older adults. The problem may be inherited in some people.

Symptoms

- Backflow (regurgitation) of food
- [Chest pain](#), which may increase after eating or may be felt in the back, neck, and arms
- Cough
- Difficulty swallowing liquids and solids
- [Heartburn](#)
- Unintentional weight loss

MedlinePlus Topics

[Esophagus Disorders](#)

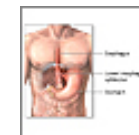
Images



[Digestive system](#)



[Upper gastrointestinal system](#)



[Achalasia - series](#)

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Exams and Tests

Physical exam may show signs of [anemia](#) or [malnutrition](#).

Tests include:

- [Esophageal manometry](#)
- [Esophagogastroduodenoscopy](#)
- [Upper GI x-ray](#)

Treatment

The goal of treatment is to reduce the pressure at the lower esophageal sphincter. Therapy may involve:

- Injection with botulinum toxin (Botox). This may help relax the sphincter muscles. However, the benefit wears off within a few weeks or months.
- Medications, such as long-acting nitrates or calcium channel blockers. These drugs can be used to relax the lower esophagus sphincter.
- Surgery (called an esophagomyotomy). This procedure may be needed to decrease the pressure in the lower sphincter.
- Widening (dilation) of the esophagus at the location of the narrowing. This is done during esophagogastroduodenoscopy.

Your doctor can help you decide which treatment is best for you.

Outlook (Prognosis)

The outcomes of surgery and nonsurgical treatments are similar. Sometimes more than one treatment is necessary.

Possible Complications

Complications may include:

- Backflow (regurgitation) of acid or food from the stomach into the esophagus (reflux)
- Breathing food contents into the lungs (aspiration), which can cause pneumonia
- Tearing (perforation) of the esophagus

When to Contact a Medical Professional

Call your health care provider if:

- You have trouble swallowing or painful swallowing
- Your symptoms continue, even with treatment for achalasia

Prevention

Many of the causes of achalasia cannot be prevented. However, treatment may help to prevent complications.

Alternative Names

Esophageal achalasia

References

Falk GW, Katzka DA. Diseases of the esophagus. In: Goldman L, Shafer AI, eds. *Cecil Medicine*. 24th ed. Philadelphia, Pa: Saunders Elsevier; 2011:chap 140.

Update Date: 2/10/2014

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Page last updated: 09 October 2014