



What is Barrett's esophagus?

Researchers estimate that about 5% to 15% of people with GERD go on to develop Barrett's esophagus.

1. Introduction

Barrett's esophagus is a condition where the esophagus is damaged by acid reflux, causing the lining to thicken and become red. The damage can actually reprogram cells in the esophagus, altering its structure and appearance so it resembles the lining of the intestines. Barrett's esophagus is associated with an increased risk of developing esophageal cancer, so it is crucial that this condition is treated early.

2. Causes

The exact cause of Barrett's esophagus is not known, but it seems to relate to chronic irritation or injury inside the esophagus. Chronic acid reflux is often associated with this condition, and most people who develop Barrett's esophagus have had GERD for at least 10 years. While these are the most likely causes, other irritants can also lead to the development of this condition.

3. Symptoms

Barrett's esophagus itself does not cause symptoms, but it is often attributed to long-standing GERD, which may include the following symptoms:

- + Frequent heartburn and regurgitation of stomach contents
- + Difficulty swallowing food
- + Chest pain
- + Heartburn
- + Chronic cough or hoarseness

Although acid reflux is a common irritation, about half of the people diagnosed with Barrett's esophagus report little or no symptoms of it.

4. Treatments

The goal of treatment for Barrett's esophagus is to heal the erosions of the esophageal lining and prevent the condition from spreading or developing into cancer. The most common treatment includes a combination of diet and lifestyle changes, along with acid-blocking medications. Other treatment options may include:

- + Radiofrequency ablation
- + Endoscopic mucosal resection
- + Esophagectomy to remove the affected sections of the esophagus

Did you know?

Barrett's esophagus affects about 1% of people worldwide.

For more information on Barrett's esophagus and supportive resources, please visit gi.org.

References:

<https://gi.org/topics/barretts-esophagus/>

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