
What is Barrett's Esophagus?

If you have Barrett's esophagus, part of the lining of the esophagus near the stomach has changed. This change is caused by the acid reflux that occurs with GERD. The changed lining is not cancer. But it can lead to cancer later on.



Symptoms of GERD

You may have GERD and feel no symptoms, or you may have symptoms such as:

- Heartburn
- Sour tasting fluid backing up into your mouth
- Frequent burping or belching
- Symptoms that get worse after you eat, bend over, or lie down

Causes of GERD

GERD happens when the muscle that blocks the opening between the esophagus and the stomach is weakened. The muscle can be weakened by smoking, excess body weight, certain medications or foods, and some types of medical problems, such as a hiatal hernia.

Your Evaluation

Barrett's esophagus is often found when a test for another problem is done. An exam for Barrett's may also be done if your GERD symptoms are severe. The best way to diagnose Barrett's is with a test called **endoscopy**. This test lets your doctor look into your esophagus.



Endoscopy

Endoscopy is an exam of your digestive tract. During the exam, an **endoscope** (a narrow tube containing a light and a small camera) is used. It is placed through your mouth into your esophagus. Then it is moved to the lower part of your esophagus, where Barrett's is usually found. This area is examined closely. Some tiny samples of tissue are taken. The samples can be examined later for signs of cancer. Your doctor may give you instructions on how to prepare for an endoscopy. Follow them carefully.

Preventing Further Damage

To keep track of the changes in your esophagus, your doctor may suggest regular tests. He or she may also suggest ways for you to control GERD. This should help keep your Barrett's from getting worse.

Lifestyle Changes

Some changes in your lifestyle can help control your GERD. Your doctor may recommend:

- Losing weight
- Avoiding foods and drinks that made GERD worse, such as high fat foods and chocolate
- Avoiding alcohol and tobacco
- Raising the head of your bed on 6" blocks



Medications

Your doctor may prescribe medications to help control your GERD. Your healthcare provider or pharmacist can also tell you which medications may make GERD worse.

If Surgery Is Needed

Surgery can help treat reflux that doesn't get better with treatment. It can also help treat cancer. Your doctor can give you more information.

When You Have GERD

GERD (**gastroesophageal reflux disease**) is stomach acid backing up into the esophagus. The **esophagus** is the tube that carries food and liquid from your mouth to your stomach. Acids in the stomach help break down and digest the food. Normally, the **sphincter muscle** keep stomach acid from flowing back into the esophagus. If this muscle is weakened, GERD may occur.

Changes in the Lining

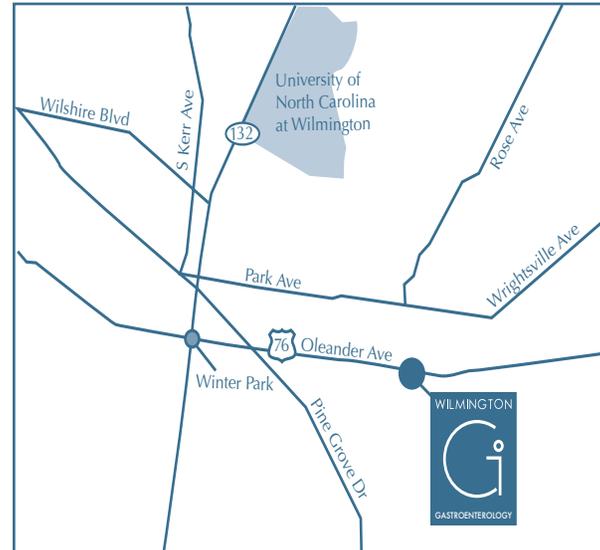
The stomach is protected from its own acid by a special lining. Stomach acid normally stays out of the esophagus. So the esophagus doesn't need an acid-resistant lining. If acid backs up during GERD, it often damages the esophagus. To protect itself, the esophagus may develop a more acid-resistance lining. This is Barrett's esophagus. The changed lining is not normal. If the lining continues to change, it may be more likely to become cancer in the future.

Living with Barrett's

Stay in touch with your doctor and keep your appointments. Get checkups as often as your doctor suggests. This may include an endoscopy every 3 years. Regular exams help catch any signs of cancer early, when it is easier to treat.

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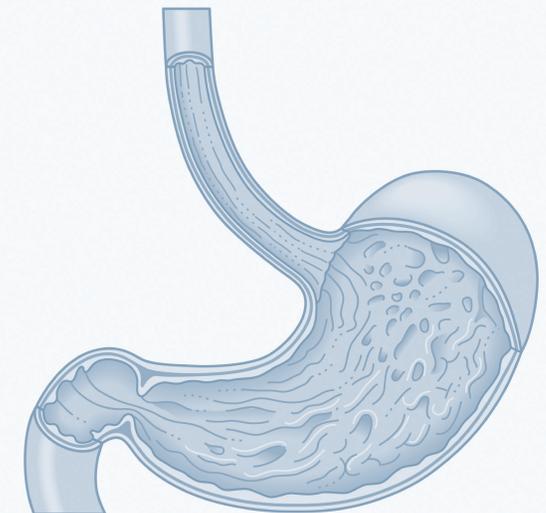
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BARRETT'S ESOPHAGUS

A Problem Caused by GERD



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