

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 (gastroesophageal reflux disease). The changed lining is not cancer. But it can lead to esophageal cancer later on.

When You Have GERD

GERD 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 food.

Normally, the sphincter muscle keeps stomach acid from flowing back into the esophagus. When 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. The esophagus does not need the acid-resistant lining. If acid backs up during GERD, it damages the esophagus. To protect itself, the esophagus may develop a more acid-resistant lining. When this happens it is called 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.

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, such as lifestyle changes, medication, or possible surgery.

This should help keep your Barrett's from getting worse.

Symptoms of GERD

- 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
- Coughing repeatedly to clear your throat
- Hoarseness