



3851 Piper Street, Ste U340 Anchorage, AK 99508

Phone 907-562-0321

## Esophagitis

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**Esophagitis** is an inflammation of the esophagus that causes pain and discomfort with swallowing. The esophagus is a muscular tube that connects the throat to the stomach. Esophagitis is a common side effect of cancer treatment. Radiation therapy and chemotherapy may cause the cancer patient to develop esophagitis.

Radiation therapy may cause esophagitis in patients who are receiving treatment to the chest and neck area. After 2-3 weeks of radiation therapy these patients may begin to notice discomfort with swallowing. Patients typically complain of burning in the neck and chest region. The discomfort will usually last through the completion of treatment with radiation therapy. The patient will start to notice improvement about 2 weeks after the completion of therapy. In most patients the esophagitis is resolved 4-6 weeks after the radiation therapy has finished.

Chemotherapy may also cause esophagitis. Certain chemotherapy drugs can cause diffuse irritation of the mucous membranes (mucositis). The esophagus is a muscular tube that is lined by a mucous membrane and may become irritated. Esophagitis usually occurs days after the administration of chemotherapy instead of weeks like the radiation therapy.

Patients who are on steroid treatments or have a suppressed immune system from their cancer treatments may develop an esophagitis due to a fungal infection (esophageal candidiasis). This is generally treated with anti-fungal oral medications. The esophagitis usually resolves over 1-2 weeks of treatment.

There are some ways for a patient to effectively deal with the symptoms of esophagitis:

- Avoid hot or spicy foods
- Avoid acidic foods such as tomato sauce and orange juice
- Drink plenty of cool liquids
- Foods which are cold or at room temperature are easier to tolerate
- Eat foods that will not distend or stretch the esophagus such as eggs, ice cream, milk shakes, etc.
- Use nutritional supplements to maintain your weight (i.e. Carnation Instant Breakfast, Ensure, Boost, Scandishake)
- Tell your physician about the symptoms. There are medications which may give relief of the symptoms