

Ablation of Barrett's Esophagus

What is Barrett's Esophagus?

Barrett's Esophagus is a change in the cells lining the esophagus, usually in response to acid coming up from the stomach. Barrett's Esophagus significantly increases the risk of cancer of the esophagus.

What is ablation and why is it performed?

Ablation is destruction of the Barrett's Esophagus using the delivery of energy to carefully control the depth of penetration. The Barrett's Esophagus is burned in a very precise manner to make the Barrett's go away, to allow normal cells to grow back. The goal is to minimize your risk of developing cancer of the esophagus. It normally requires approximately 3 ablation sessions (performed every 2 months) for the Barrett's Esophagus to go away completely.

What are the risks and complications of ablation?

Since ablation is the controlled destruction of tissue, you need to understand that there are risks involved. The most common risks are: pain, bleeding, side effects of medications given for the procedure, and infection (mostly at the IV site). Less common but more serious complications include: stricture formation (narrowing of the esophagus), perforation (causing a hole in the esophagus), and aspiration (having liquid get into the airway). Strictures cause difficulty swallowing (food getting "hung up" in the chest area) and may not be apparent for weeks or months after the ablation session. Perforations lead to severe chest pain, difficulty breathing, and symptoms of infection. Perforations require hospitalization and possible surgery.

How will I get ready for the procedure?

You should have already met with your gastroenterologist to discuss this procedure in detail. The procedure scheduler will be giving you a separate instruction sheet with detailed information. Please read and follow these instructions carefully.

What should I expect after the ablation?

You will be given a detailed information/instruction sheet after the ablation session. In brief, you may experience any or all of the following: chest pain (occasionally severe) with eating/drinking, sore throat, nausea/vomiting, mild bleeding, mild forgetfulness (amnesia) especially immediately after the procedure, gassiness/bloating, mild bleeding, and discomfort at the IV site. Most of these side effects are mild and only last hours. Most patients experience some degree of chest pain. Occasionally, the pain can be quite severe and may interfere with your willingness to eat/drink. Take the medications prescribed as directed. It is also important that you follow the dietary guidelines as well, to avoid pain and dehydration. At first it may hurt to eat solid foods. It is perfectly safe to subsist on liquids alone for a number of days, as long as you do not become dehydrated. The discharge instructions will give you guidelines on when to call for help/advice.

If you have any questions about any of the information, please call our office and ask to speak with your physician's triage nurse. If you need to reschedule or cancel your procedure, ask to speak with your physician's Procedure Scheduler.