

# MEDfacts

An Educational Health Series From National Jewish Health®



## Eosinophilic Esophagitis (EoE)

### What are Gastrointestinal Eosinophilic Diseases (EGID)?

EGIDs are a group of diseases that may have a wide variety of gastrointestinal (GI) symptoms. Symptoms occur in combination with increased numbers of eosinophils in the gastrointestinal lining. Eosinophils are a type of white blood cell that has often been seen with allergic diseases, but also are found in other diseases. The abundance of eosinophils can inflame or damage the GI tract.

Depending on the part of the GI tract affected, EGIDs can be called a variety of different names, such as:

- eosinophilic esophagitis (EoE)
- eosinophilic gastritis (EG)
- eosinophilic gastroenteritis (EGE)
- eosinophilic colitis (EC)

### What is eosinophilic esophagitis (EoE)?

Although EGID can affect all parts of the GI tract, esophageal esophagitis is often seen. EoE affects the esophagus. The esophagus is the tube that connects the mouth to the stomach. EoE is often a reaction to food allergies, gastroesophageal reflux, or environmental allergies.

### What are common symptoms?

The symptoms of EoE may include swallowing problems (dysphasia), vomiting, food getting stuck in the esophagus (food impaction), heartburn or chest pain, abdominal pain, coughing, or slow growth.

The typical EoE patient is a toddler who displays an immune or allergic response, is vomiting and has feeding problems. The toddler may respond to a simple diet that excludes certain types of foods. Other people may have food impaction and swallowing problems.

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There are also people who may have atypical symptoms, are not having an immune or allergic response, do not respond to dietary exclusions, and may have isolated food impaction incidents. People with GERD may also have the same symptoms.

### How is EoE diagnosed?

The doctor will ask questions about your/your child's health and symptoms. Make sure to tell the doctor if anyone in your family has allergies. If family members have allergies, the chances of having allergies increase. Your doctor uses the following information to make a diagnosis of EoE:

- History of symptoms
- Family history of symptoms
- Physical exam
- Allergy tests
- Endoscopy - An endoscopy allows the doctor to look inside the esophagus, stomach and upper small intestine. These are the upper portions of the digestive system. The doctor will use a small flexible tube, starting at the mouth, to see inside the body. The doctor may also do a biopsy during the endoscopy. During a biopsy a small amount of the tissue is taken from the lining of the digestive system. The tissue can be studied closely to help determine the diagnosis and the best treatment.

### How is EoE treated?

- If EoE is a result of food allergies, removing the foods from the diet is recommended. Here are some things you can do for food allergies:
  - Learn more about your food allergies and how to avoid foods you are allergic to. Talk with your/your child's doctor, nurse or a registered dietitian.
  - Avoid foods to which you are allergic.
  - Know all the different names of foods to which you are allergic.
  - Read labels carefully to identify foods in packages.
  - Ask about foods served away from your home.
  - Educate adults caring for your children about food allergies.
  - Encourage children with food allergies not to eat food given to them by friends.
  - Use and understand allergy medications.
  - Carry injectable epinephrine (Epi-Pen or Autoinjector) and an oral antihistamine such as Benadryl as prescribed for emergencies.
- If EoE is aggravated by gastroesophageal reflux, treating the reflux may help the EoE. This may include medication, lifestyle, physical and dietary measures to decrease reflux.
- Inhaled steroids may be sprayed in the mouth and swallowed to help reduce inflammation in the esophagus. Ask your health care provider how to use this medication correctly.
- If a constriction of the esophagus is seen during the endoscopy widening (dilation) of the esophagus may be done. This can help with food impaction and trouble swallowing.
- If allergens are determined to be the cause of EoE, your allergist will work with you on how to avoid the things that trigger your symptoms.

- Research studies are currently underway to assess the effectiveness of certain medications (e.g., mepolizumab, budesonide).

### What is the role of National Jewish Health?

The Gastrointestinal Eosinophilic Diseases Program (GEDP) is a joint program National Jewish Health and The Children's Hospital that provides state-of-the-art, multidisciplinary care to patients affected by eosinophilic gastrointestinal diseases (EGIDs), including eosinophilic esophagitis (EoE). A team of medical professionals from two world-class healthcare institutions, this is the only multidisciplinary program caring for children with EGIDs in the Midwestern United States and Rocky Mountain regions.

A multidisciplinary evaluation is coordinated by a physician assistant and nurse and may also involve board-certified pediatric gastroenterologists and allergists, nutritionists, and feeding specialists when appropriate. Specialized social work services also are readily available. Once the testing is completed treatment options are reviewed and discussed in detail with families and appropriate support is provided. Follow up occurs by telephone and during future appointments.

Note: This information is provided to you as an educational service of LUNG LINE® (1-800-222-LUNG). It is not meant to be a substitute for consulting with your own physician.

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