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Barrett's Esophagus

Barrett's esophagus is a condition in which the cells of your lower esophagus become damaged, usually from repeated exposure to stomach acid. The damage causes changes to the color and composition of the esophageal cells. The lining of the esophagus is replaced by a tissue type similar to that normally found in the intestine. This is called intestinal metaplasia.

Barrett's esophagus may be associated with having heartburn, but it may cause no symptoms on its own. It is relatively common and most often diagnosed in people who have long-term gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD). GERD is a chronic regurgitation of acid into the lower esophagus. Only a small percentage of people with GERD will develop Barrett's esophagus.

A diagnosis of Barrett's esophagus can be concerning because it increases the risk of developing esophageal cancer. Although the risk of esophageal cancer is small, monitoring of Barrett's esophagus focuses on periodic exams to find precancerous esophagus cells. If precancerous cells are discovered, they can be treated to prevent esophageal cancer.