

## Patient education: Eosinophilic esophagitis (The Basics)

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

### What is eosinophilic esophagitis?

Eosinophilic esophagitis is a condition that affects the esophagus, the tube that carries food from the mouth to the stomach ([figure 1](#)). This condition is called "EoE" for short. In EoE, the esophagus has cells called "eosinophils" in it. Eosinophils are allergy cells that are not normally found in the esophagus.

Doctors don't know for sure what causes EoE. But they think it might be caused by allergies, especially food allergies.

EoE sometimes runs in families. It can happen in both children and adults.

### What are the symptoms of eosinophilic esophagitis?

Symptoms can be different, depending on a person's age.

Adults and teens usually have symptoms such as:

- Trouble swallowing – This is the most common symptom. People usually have trouble swallowing solid foods. Some people have pain with swallowing or feel like the food gets stuck in their throat or chest.
- Chest or upper belly pain
- Burning in the chest (heartburn) that doesn't get better after taking medicine to treat heartburn

Children usually have symptoms such as:

- Feeding problems, such as refusing to eat solid foods
- Nausea or vomiting
- Belly pain

### Is there a test for eosinophilic esophagitis?

Yes. The test done most often to check for this condition is an upper endoscopy.

During an upper endoscopy, a doctor (called a gastroenterologist) puts a thin tube with a camera and light on the end into your mouth and down into your esophagus ([figure 2](#)). He or she will look at the lining of the esophagus and take small samples of it. Another doctor will then look at the cells under a microscope to see if you have EoE.

### How is eosinophilic esophagitis treated?

Treatment usually involves diet changes and medicines:

- Diet changes – Your doctor might have you avoid foods that could be causing your symptoms. There are 3 main ways to do this. You can:
  - Avoid the foods that most commonly cause EoE
  - Avoid the foods you are allergic to – To figure out the foods you are allergic to, you might need to see an allergist (allergy doctor) and have tests.
  - Go on a special liquid diet and avoid all solid foods

To make sure you get the nutrition you need, your doctor might recommend that you work with a dietitian (food expert). After your symptoms improve, you will be able to add foods back into your diet.

- Medicines – Doctors can use different medicines to treat EoE. One is called a "proton pump inhibitor." This medicine is usually used to treat acid reflux, which is when acid that is normally in the stomach backs up into the esophagus. People with EoE sometimes have acid reflux, but this medicine can treat EoE, too.

Other medicines include steroids, which help reduce inflammation. (These are **not** the same as the steroids some athletes take illegally.) Sometimes, steroids come in a device called an inhaler or a device called a "nebulizer," but you don't breathe in the steroids the way you normally would with inhaler medicines. Instead, you allow the medicine to accumulate in your mouth and then you swallow. Other times, steroids come as a liquid or pill.

In some people, EoE leads to a condition called an esophageal stricture, which is a narrowing of the esophagus. The main treatment for an esophageal stricture in people who do not improve with medicines is a procedure to widen the esophagus, called "dilation." This procedure is done during endoscopy.

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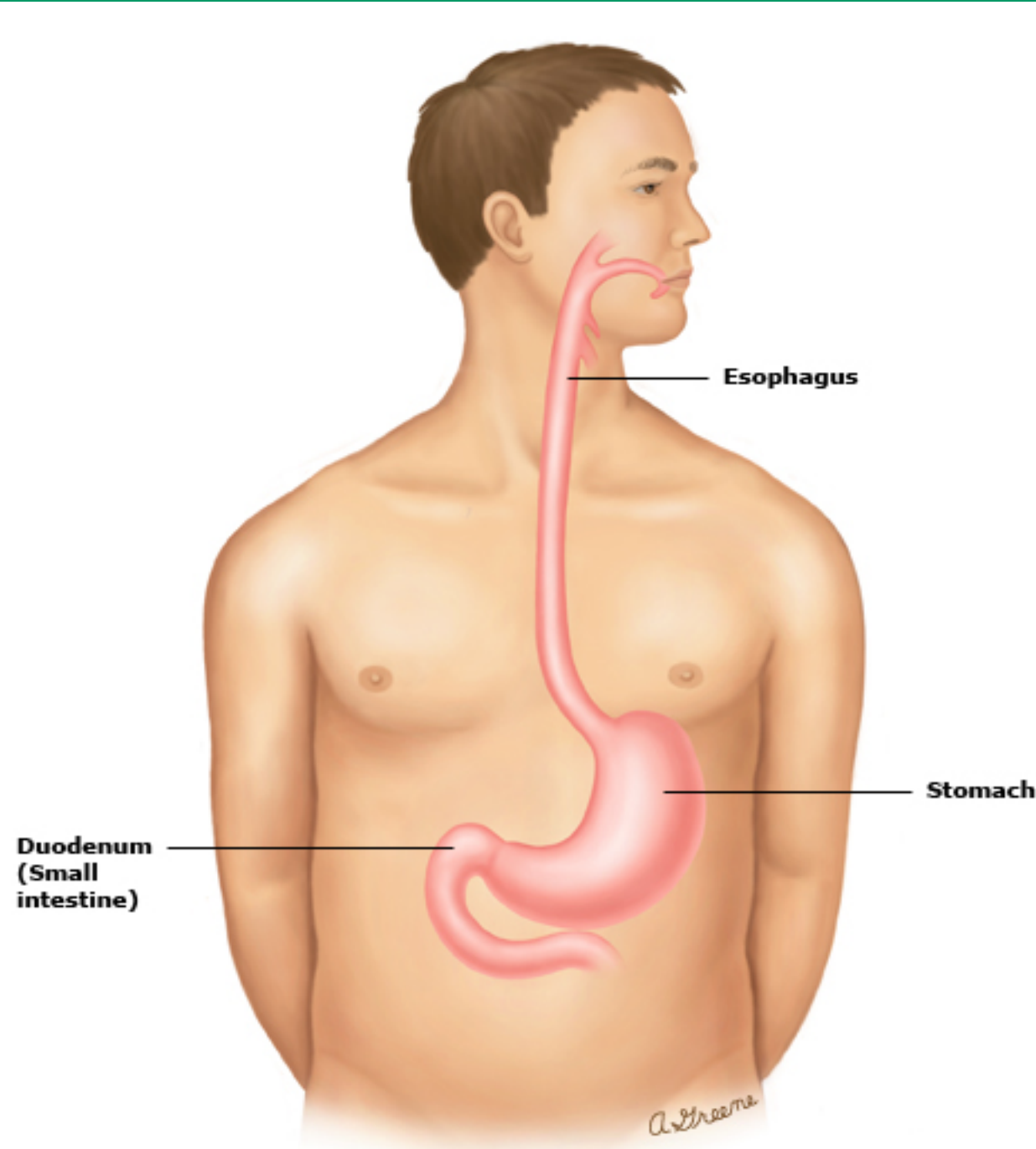
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Topic 86229 Version 7.0

## GRAPHICS

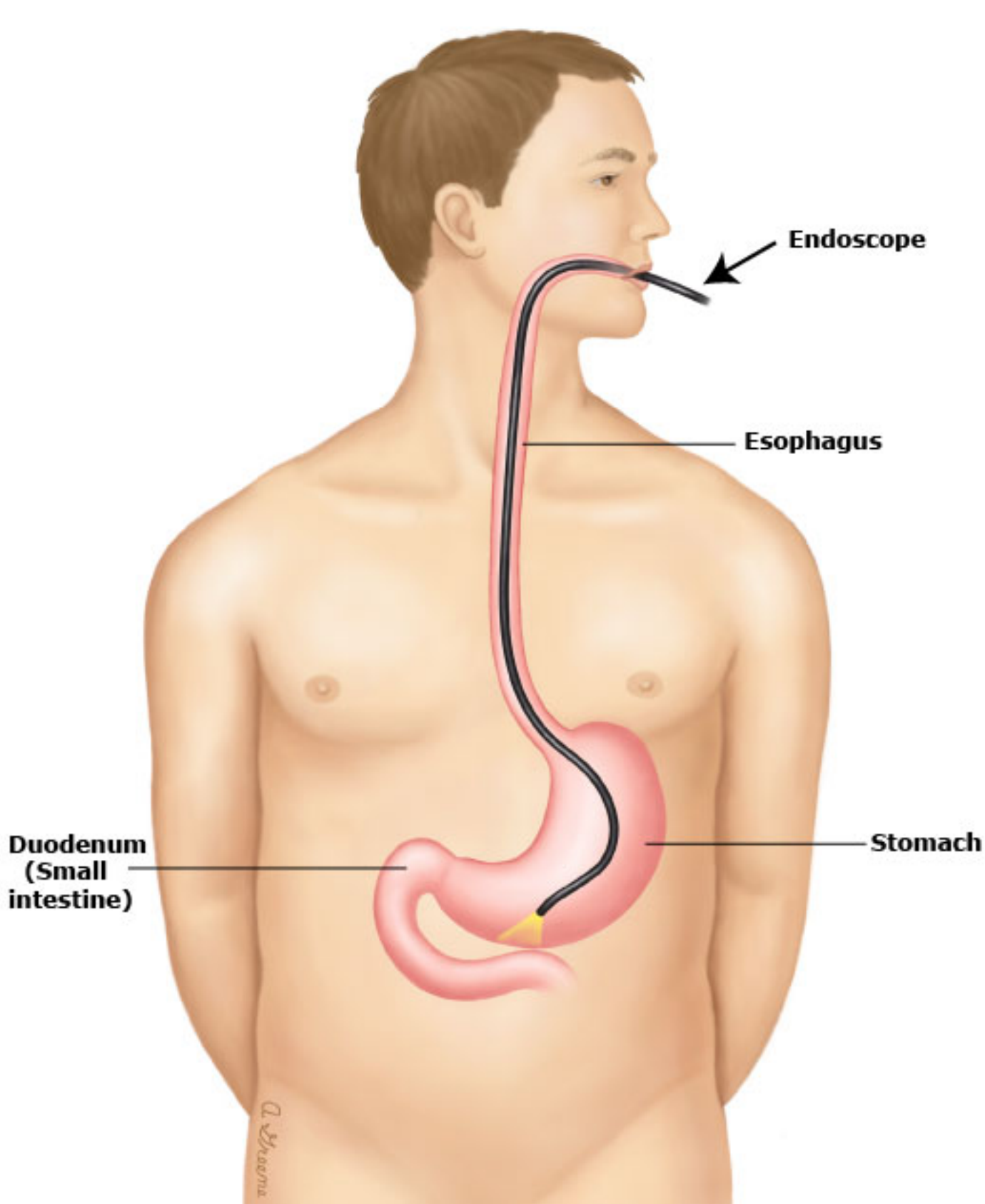
### Upper digestive tract



The upper digestive tract includes the esophagus (the tube that connects the mouth to the stomach), the stomach, and the duodenum (the first part of the small intestine).

Graphic 55616 Version 6.0

### Upper endoscopy



During an upper endoscopy, you lie down and the doctor puts a thin tube with a camera and light on the end (called an endoscope) into your mouth and down into your esophagus, stomach, and duodenum (the first part of your small intestine). The camera sends pictures from inside your body to a television screen. That way, your doctor can see the inside of your esophagus, stomach, and duodenum.

Graphic 75392 Version 4.0