

UNDERSTANDING UPPER ENDOSCOPY

What is an upper Endoscopy?

An upper endoscopy lets your doctor examine the lining of the upper part of your gastrointestinal tract, which includes the esophagus, stomach and duodenum (first portion of the small intestine). Your doctor will use a thin flexible tube called an endoscope, which has its own lens and light source, and will view the images on a video monitor. You might hear your doctor or other medical staff refer to upper endoscopy as upper GI endoscopy, esophagogastroduodenoscopy (EGD) or panendoscopy.

Why is upper endoscopy done?

Upper endoscopy helps your doctor evaluate symptoms of persistent upper abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting or difficulty swallowing. It's the best more accurate than X-ray films for detecting inflammation, ulcers, tumors of the esophagus, stomach and duodenum.

Your doctor might use upper endoscopy to obtain a biopsy (small tissue samples). A biopsy helps your doctor distinguish between benign and malignant (Cancerous) tissues. Remember, biopsies are taken for many reasons, and your doctor might order one even if he or she does not suspect cancer. For example, your doctor might use a biopsy to test for helicobacter pylori, the bacterium that causes ulcers.

Your doctor might also use upper endoscopy to perform a cytology test, where he or she will introduce a small brush to collect cells for analysis.

Upper endoscopy is also used to treat conditions of the upper gastrointestinal tract. Your doctor can pass instruments through the endoscope to directly treat many abnormalities – this will cause you little or no discomfort. For example, your doctor might stretch (dilate) a narrowed area, remove polyps (usually benign growths) or treat bleeding.

What preparations are required?

An empty stomach allows for the best and safest examination, so, having nothing to eat or drink for 24 hours, including water before the examination is recommended.

Tell your doctor in advance about the medications you take; as you might need to adjust your usual dose for the examination. Discuss any allergies to medications as well as medical conditions, such as heart or lung disease.

For more information, please review EGD instructions.

Can I take my current medications?

Most medications can be continued as usual, but some can interfere with the preparation or examination. Inform your doctor about medications you are taking particularly aspirin products or anti platelet agents, arthritis, medications, anticoagulants (blood thinners such as warfarin or heparin), clopidogrel, insulin, or iron products.

What happens during an upper endoscopy?

There will be a small bite block placed in your mouth to protect your teeth and gums. Your doctor will pass the endoscope through your mouth and into the esophagus, stomach and duodenum. The endoscope doesn't interfere with your breathing. Most patients consider the test only slightly uncomfortable.

What happens after the upper endoscopy?

You will be monitored until most of the effects of the medication have worn off. Your throat may be a little sore and you may feel bloated because of the air we introduce into the stomach during the test. You will be able to eat after you leave unless the doctor instructs you otherwise.

Your physician will explain the results of the examination to you, although you will have to wait for the results of any biopsies performed (usually 7-10 days).

You must have someone to drive you home and stay with you for the remainder of the day. Even if you feel alert after the procedure, your judgement and reflexes could be impaired for the rest of the day.

What are the possible complications of an upper endoscopy?

Although complications can occur, they are rare when doctors who are specially trained and experienced in the procedure perform the test. Bleeding can occur at a biopsy sight or where a polyp was removed, but it is usually minimal and rarely requires a follow up. Perforation (hole or tear in the gastrointestinal tract lining) may require surgery, but this is a very uncommon complication. Some patients may have a reaction to the sedative or complications from heart or lung disease.

Although complications after upper endoscopy are very uncommon, it is important to recognize early signs of possible complications. Contact your doctor immediately if you have a fever after the test or if you notice trouble swallowing or increasing throat, chest or abdominal pain or bleeding, including black stools. Note, that bleeding can occur several days after the procedure.

If you have any concerns about a possible complication, it is always best to contact your doctor right away.