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Understanding Oesophageal Cancer

What is Oesophageal Cancer?

Oesophagus is a long, muscular, hollow tube connecting the throat to the stomach. Oesophageal Cancer usually originates in the cells lining the inside of the oesophagus and can occur anywhere along its length.

Types of Oesophageal Cancer

Oesophageal cancer is classified according to the type of cells involved and may include:

Adenocarcinoma: This type of cancer originates in gland cells that produce mucus. Adenocarcinoma most frequently develops in the lower portion of the oesophagus

Squamous Cell Carcinoma: Squamous cells are flat, thin cells lining the surface of the oesophagus. Squamous cell carcinoma occurs most often in the upper and middle portions of the oesophagus

Other rare types: These include small-cell Carcinoma, Sarcoma, Lymphoma, Melanoma, and Choriocarcinoma

Causes

Factors such as acidity, obesity, viral infections, and related issues contribute to the incidence of Oesophageal Cancer. It occurs due to the formation and rapid growth of malignant cells' in the oesophageal tissue. Initially, it may present symptoms like difficulty swallowing solid foods, progressing to difficulty swallowing liquids as the cancer grows and eventually leading to complete blockage of the oesophagus.

Risk Factors

Various factors increase the risk of Oesophageal Cancer, ranging from mild to severe. Major risk factors include:

- Obesity
- Smoking
- Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)
- Bile reflux
- Consumption of extremely hot fluids
- Poor dietary habits

Symptoms

Symptoms of a Oesophageal Cancer Tear may present differently in each individual, but some of the most common symptoms observed are:

- Difficulty swallowing (dysphagia)

- Rapid weight loss
- Chest pain or burning sensation
- Indigestion or heartburn
- Persistent coughing
- Vomiting

Diagnosis

In cases where Oesophageal Cancer is suspected, healthcare experts may recommend a combination of tests, including CT, MRI and PET scans, endoscopic ultrasound, bronchoscopy, and blood tests. A biopsy may also be performed to confirm the presence of cancer cells. Oesophageal Cancer is staged from 0 to IV, with lower stages indicating smaller tumours confined to the superficial layers of the oesophagus. In contrast, stage IV indicates advanced cancer that has spread to other parts of the body.

Treatment

Treatment options depend on the type of Oesophageal Cancer, patient's health, treatment preferences and may include:

- **Laparoscopic & Robotic Cancer Surgery:** Removal of the tumour and surrounding tissues to prevent further spread with minimal access surgical techniques
- **Chemotherapy:** Using drugs to kill cancer cells
- **Radiation Therapy:** Using high-energy rays to destroy cancer cells
- **Targeted Therapy:** Drugs targeting specific proteins that control cancer cell growth and spread
- **Immunotherapy:** Used for advanced, relapsed, or metastasised cancer

Prevention

Lifestyle modifications can reduce the risk of Oesophageal Cancer, such as:

- Quitting smoking
- Limiting alcohol intake
- Eating a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains
- Maintaining a healthy weight

When to seek medical attention

Cancer has a better prognosis with early detection and prompt treatment. If one starts to experience chest pain and indigestion with vomiting, a healthcare provider should be promptly consulted for screening and diagnosis.