

Esophageal Candidiasis

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Summary:

Esophageal candidiasis is a fungal infection of the esophagus — the tube connecting the mouth to the stomach. There are a variety of drugs available to treat this condition.

What is esophageal candidiasis?

Esophageal candidiasis is an infection of the esophagus — the tube that connects the mouth to the stomach. It is caused by an overgrowth of *Candida*, a fungus that is normally found in the mouth, gastrointestinal tract and vagina, as well as on the skin. *Candida* is part of the normal “flora” of bacteria and fungi that live in or on the human body. *Candida* causes health problems only when there is an overgrowth.

Esophageal candidiasis is an AIDS-defining illness. Like most of the conditions associated with AIDS, esophageal candidiasis has become rare, thanks to effective combination antiretroviral therapy (drug cocktails).

What are the symptoms of esophageal candidiasis?

Candidiasis in the esophagus can cause difficulty swallowing, a sore throat and sometimes a feeling of chest pain, just behind the breastbone.

Diagnosis

Esophageal candidiasis is usually diagnosed on the basis of the patient’s symptoms, and treatment begins right away. However, since there are other conditions that can cause similar symptoms, doctors may also do an endoscopy. The endoscope is a very thin, flexible tube with a viewing device on the end. It is inserted

through the mouth and down the esophagus, and allows the doctor to look at the lining of the esophagus.

Prevention

Because the *Candida* fungus naturally lives in or on our bodies, it is impossible to avoid it. However, there are several ways to help keep it under control.

- The best way to reduce the risk of getting esophageal candidiasis is to keep your immune system strong. Effective antiretroviral therapy (drug cocktails) can keep HIV under control and prevent it from destroying CD4+ cells.
- Cutting down on sugars and starchy food has been suggested as a way of helping to control candidiasis.
- Eating 8 ounces of unsweetened yogurt with “live” bacterial culture (*Lactobacillus acidophilus*) every day may keep the *Candida* fungus under control. *Lactobacillus acidophilus* is also available at health food stores, either in capsules or as a powder to be taken with meals.

Treatment

The amount of drug and the length of time it must be taken varies, depending on the severity of the candidiasis. Treatment options include:

- fluconazole (Diflucan) tablets (100 mg - 200 mg daily)
- itraconazole (Sporanox) liquid (100 mg - 200 mg daily)
- IV fluconazole or amphotericin B for five to seven days

Deirdre Maclean

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Disclaimer

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