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Eosinophilic Esophagitis

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Eosinophils are a type of white blood cell. An increase of eosinophils may be caused by allergies, infections (often due to parasites), eosinophilic gastrointestinal disorders, leukemia and others. Eosinophilic Esophagitis (EE) is associated with high numbers of eosinophils that accumulate in the esophagus (tube through which food passes to stomach) causing inflammation. Each disorder is classified according to the area in which the eosinophils accumulate. Many people with EE have other allergic disorders and/or a family history of allergic disorders.

Eosinophilic Esophagitis (EE):

Symptoms:

Symptoms may vary and differ depending on the age of the individual.

- Reflux (heartburn)
- Dysphagia (trouble swallowing)
- Nausea and vomiting
- Food impactions (food gets stuck in the throat)
- Failure to thrive (poor growth or poor weight gain)
- Poor appetite
- Malnutrition
- Abdominal or chest pain
- Difficulty sleeping due to above symptoms such as reflux.

Diagnosis:

- Biopsies of the esophagus are taken by a gastroenterologist (physician that specializes in disorders of the stomach, intestines and other associated organs) to look for high levels of eosinophils that may be accompanied by swelling or thickening of the esophageal layers.
- Food allergy testing is typically done to look for foods that may trigger the eosinophilic damage. Testing may include prick (scratch) tests, blood tests and patch testing.
- Environmental skin testing to pollens, molds, dust mites and animals may also be done since new research suggests a possible role that these allergens may contribute.
- Skin testing, blood testing and patch testing for allergies should be done by an allergist certified by the American Board of Allergy and Immunology.

Treatment:

- If a food allergy is identified, strict elimination of the offending food/foods is indicated, either briefly or permanently. At times, pre-digested formulas may be needed.
- Currently there are no FDA approved medications for the treatment of EE; however different types of therapy are under investigation.
- Current therapies that are showing promising results include swallowing oral steroids such as prednisone or swallowing steroids from an asthma inhaler or nebulizer.
- Acid suppression medications are used if acid reflux is present.