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## BARRETT'S OESOPHAGUS

Barrett's oesophagus occurs in up to 10-15% of patients with gastro-oesophageal reflux. In this condition the cells lining the lower end of the oesophagus (gullet) become replaced by cells more typical of the lining of the small intestine.

This unusual metamorphosis appears to be due to a unique reparative process occurring after frequent contact of the oesophagus lining with refluxed stomach juices. The new lining is more resistant to acid attack.

Unfortunately, an increased risk of cancer in this new Barrett's lining has been reported, particularly when it has been present for many years. Although the real risk of developing oesophageal cancer in any individual is small, it is wise to have follow-up examinations of the oesophagus every year by gastroscopy. During follow-up examinations biopsies of the lining will be taken.

Medications designed to reduce stomach acidity and reflux symptoms may help to prevent the development of Barrett's oesophagus and reduce the chance of developing cancer. Reduction in alcohol intake and avoiding smoking is also advised.

### KEY WORDS

#### BARRETT'S MUCOSA

A change in the type of cells lining the lower oesophagus.

