TedTalk

7-10 MINUTES

Imagine with me you have a rare disease, a rare esophagus disease to be exact. After years of talking to multiple doctors and specialists you finally have an endoscopy and once you are finished the doctor walks over to you. “you have” and then everything goes quiet. You are not quite sure if it’s the anesthesia wearing off, or the fact that your doctor must have just spoken in another language, but you can’t process what he said. Eosinophilic Esophagitis try saying that 5 times fast. Cool. Now you have a name for what you have, what does it mean?

Less than 20 years ago, doctors discovered this diseased they called Eosinophilic Esophagitis. It only affects 1 in every 100,000 people. EoE is an autoimmune disease affecting the esophagus. You know how people who have allergic reactions go into anaphylactic shock and their throat closes up? It is exactly like that, but it’s a lot slower, and it never. Goes. Away. These little white blood cells called eosinophils group together and attack the tissue of the esophagus causing damage and inflammation. Basically, your body is constantly attacking itself. This causes ridges to form in the esophagus, and the severity of these ridges are how doctors are able to measure the severity of the disease.

The symptoms of this disease are less than straightforward. The major symptoms are food getting stuck in the throat. Sometimes this can cause a person to choke, but more often than not it feels like that lump in your throat feeling you get when you’re about to cry. Swallowing is more difficult, especially foods with coarse or dry textures. Chest and stomach pain, heartburn, and vomiting are also common. This all leads to many food aversions. If food is the main source of your problems would you want to be eating it?

With this disease, some days are better than others. Bad days can be caused by a multitude of things. If you have seasonal allergies to pollen, be ready for spring. Even environmental allergies can cause flareups.

So now that you know a little bit more about this, you may be wondering about what can you do? Well, the short answer is nothing. There is no cure. The only thing you can do is avoid anything that you know will cause a flareup. There are medications that help to reduce the amount of acid in the stomach and esophagus called Proton Pump Inhibitors or PPIs. While these are great, and can be used to help with inflammation, you are not meant to be on them long-term. Another possible avenue is to take corticosteroids. These can help to reduce inflammation, but again, these are not supposed to be long-term solutions.

A simple solution is to avoid things that make it worse, and while this sounds simple enough, the only way to know is through trial and error. Since EoE causes your body to be in a constant state of allergic reaction, even if you were to take an allergy test, you would show up as allergic to everything. Many doctors start with a full elimination diet, and then slowly adding foods back in as you go on.

Sadly, there is no cure. There is no way to stop this from happening.