

Esophageal Cancer Treatment Options

Jonathan Salo MD

Levine Cancer Institute

Click Right Arrow → to Begin

I'm Dr Jonathan Salo, a GI Cancer Surgeon in Charlotte, North Carolina. If you or someone close to you has been diagnosed with esophageal cancer, this video is for you. In this video, you will learn about

- The esophageal cancer care team
- Four different categories of esophageal cancer
- How the cancer stage helps make treatment decisions

These videos were designed to help my patients understand their cancer and its treatment.

The internet is a great tool for learning, including learning about cancer.

But when you or a family member receives a new diagnosis of cancer, it's important that you receive information that is specifically tailored to your situation.

Care Team

The care of esophageal cancer takes a whole team working together to give you the best care. Let's take a look at the different team members:

Gastroenterologist works with an endoscope, which is a flexible tube which inserted through the mouth into the esophagus. The gastroenterologist may perform one of several procedures in your care:

Upper endoscopy to examine the inside of the esophagus and stomach and biopsy any concerning areas

Endoscopic ultrasound is used in some cases to carefully examine the depth of invasion of a tumor in the esophagus or stomach

A gastroenterologist may also treat small cancers of the esophagus and stomach with endoscopic therapy such as an endoscopic mucosal resection

Diagnostic radiologist

Interpret CT or PET scans Perform biopsies under the guidance of CT or ultrasound

Medical Oncologist

Treat cancer with chemotherapy or immunotherapy, using drugs given intravenously (and sometimes by pill).

Radiation Therapist

Treats cancer with high-energy x-rays that target tumors in the esophagus and nearby lymph nodes

Surgeon

Perform surgery to remove the cancer in the esophagus and surrounding lymph nodes and reconstruct the gastrointestinal tract.

A surgeon may also place a feeding tube if needed, and place a central venous port for chemotherapy.

Treatment Decisions

Treatment decisions may require consultation a number of specialists

Treatment Categories of Esophageal Cancer

four different treatment categories of esophageal cancer

- I = Superficial -> Treated without surgery
 - II = Localized -> Treated with surgery alone
 - III = Locally Advanced -> Chemotherapy + Radiation -> Surgery
 - IV = Metastatic -> Chemotherapy
-

Deciding on Treatment

Several Factors go into making a decision about treatment for esophageal cancer:

- Cancer Stage
 - Overall fitness of the patient
 - Patient preferences
-

Staging

The first task once we have a new diagnosis of cancer is staging. Staging is the process of finding out the extent of the cancer and how far it might have spread.

In some cases, there may be more than one treatment that is appropriate for the cancer stage, but the different treatments may be more or less rigorous. In these cases, the overall health of the patient will help find the best treatment.

In other cases, there may be more than one treatment option and a patient's preferences in terms of the type of treatment become important.

All in all, the treatment decision requires a discussion between the patient and their care team to come up with the best plan. The purpose of these video is to provide you with background information and of course are no substitute for meeting with your treatment team.

This video will cover all four treatment categories, which for many people allows them to get a broad overview, but for some it can be a bit overwhelming because there is a lot of information that *may not* apply to them.

Some of you will want more specific information that applies to your situation or that of a family member. I'll try to direct you to the right information.

The first step in designing a treatment plan for esophageal cancer is staging. If you haven't seen it already, please see the video about esophageal cancer diagnosis and staging to give you an overview.

Esophageal Cancer Diagnosis and Staging

Category? Stage?

You'll notice I'm using the terms "Treatment Category I" rather than "Stage I". The reason is very simple. The cancer staging system was originally designed for researchers to predict outcomes after cancer treatment.

But for cancer patients and their families, what's important is what the best treatment is for their cancer. Unfortunately, the cancer stages don't exactly line up with how that cancer is treated.

For instance, some Stage II patients are best treated with surgery while other Stage II patients are best treated with a combination of chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery.

The goal of these videos is to help patients understand *cancer treatment*.

Having said that, Stage 1 patients are *generally* treated with Treatment Category I, and the same with Stages 2, 3, and 4

What if I don't know the stage?

If you haven't met with your treatment team to talk about the stage, I can give you some general direction to help get you started.

Patients who had difficulty swallowing usually have Category III or Category IV cancers. If you want more specific information esophageal cancer and there is difficulty swallowing or weight loss involved, Click on the link above, which will give you information about how we approach esophageal cancer when there is difficulty swallowing. These videos talk about Category III and Stage IV cancers of the esophagus, and about staging and treatment. Esophageal Cancer Treatment - Stage 3_4

Patients without difficulty swallowing often have Stage I or Stage II cancers. These patients may have bleeding, or heartburn, or may have no symptoms. If you want more specific information about Category I or Category II cancers, click on the link above. This video will give you information about Category I and Category II cancers, and about staging and treatment.

Esophageal Cancer Treatment - Stage 1_2

We hope you have found this video helpful. If you have questions or if there are topics you would like us to cover, please leave a comment below. Feel free to subscribe to be notified when we post new videos.