

Esophageal Cancer Treatment Options

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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

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

One of the challenges with communicating medical information by video is that not everyone's situation is the same. It goes without saying that the internet is no substitute for talking with your esophageal cancer care team. If you haven't already, you may want to watch our video about ~~your~~ your cancer care team. I'll

There is a lot of information on the internet about cancer, and it can be a bit overwhelming. With these videos we will try to help guide you to the information that's right for you.

In general, patients with esophageal cancer will fit into one of two groups: Those with *Early Stage Disease* and those with *Advanced Disease*.

Patients with Advanced Stage Disease generally have difficulty eating and they have T3 tumors, and frequently have lost weight. If you haven't already, you may want to watch our video about your esophageal cancer staging. I'll leave a link in the description below and the care above. Esophageal Cancer Staging

Patients with *Early Stage Disease* generally have T1 or T2 tumors and while they may have bleeding or reflux symptoms, they don't have difficulty eating or weight loss.

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
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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.

Obstructing vs Non-obstructing

For most patients with esophageal cancer, difficulty swallowing is frequently the first symptom they have that something is wrong. This can be accompanied by weight loss or regurgitation of food. These patients have obstructing tumors, and are usually Category III or Category IV, meaning they are locally advanced or metastatic. This video provides more information on obstructing esophageal cancer

Obstructing esophageal tumors

Non-obstructing esophageal cancers

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, meaning they are superficial or localized.

Non-obstructing esophageal tumors

To review: Patients with non-obstructing esophageal cancer are more likely to have tumors that are superficial or localized, while patients with obstructing esophageal cancer are more likely to have tumors that are locally-advanced or metastatic.

We hope you have found this video helpful. This videos and others like it are designed to educate patients and families about esophageal cancer and equip them for their discussions with their esophageal cancer care team. As always, these videos are no substitute for expert medical advice.

Feel free to leave a comment or a question, or if you have suggestions for future videos.
