

FAQS: ESOPHAGUS WITH REACTIVE OR REFLUX CHANGES, NOT INCLUDING BARRETT'S ESOPHAGUS

UNDERSTANDING YOUR PATHOLOGY REPORT: A FAQ SHEET

When your doctor examined your esophagus with the endoscope, he took biopsies. These biopsies were sent to a specialized doctor with many years of training called a pathologist, who examined them under the microscope. The pathology report tells your physician the diagnosis in each of your samples, and helps to manage your care. This FAQ sheet is designed to help you understand the medical language used in the pathology report.

1. What does “GEJ” mean?

The esophagus is a tubular organ that connects the mouth to the stomach. GEJ means “Gastro-esophageal junction,” which is where the esophagus meets the stomach.

2. What does “squamous mucosa” mean?

The lining of the esophagus is known as the “mucosa.” Most of the esophagus is lined by squamous cells, similar to those seen on the surface of the skin.

3. What are “reactive changes?”

A number of things, including chronic regurgitation (reflux, acid reflux, heartburn) of the stomach contents up into the esophagus, trauma from taking medications, and infections, can injure the squamous lining, which reacts to the injury and tries to repair itself. The pathologist looking at samples of your esophagus under the microscope describes a reactive, reparative appearance as “reactive changes.”

4. Do “reactive changes” in my esophagus put me at risk for cancer?

No. Reactive changes do not develop into cancer. However, your treating physician will work with you to treat the process that is causing the reactive changes so that the esophagus can heal and the lining can return to a normal appearance.

5. What are “reflux changes?”

Reflux, or “acid reflux”, means regurgitation of the acid stomach contents up into the esophagus. Prolonged exposure to the acid injures the squamous lining of the esophagus, causing characteristic reactive changes that the pathologist can recognize under the microscope

6. Does reflux cause cancer?

By itself, reflux does not cause cancer. However, prolonged reflux can also, in addition to reactive changes, lead, less commonly, to other changes in the squamous mucosa esophageal lining that can put patients at risk for cancer. Your treating physician will work with you to treat your reflux, which can help prevent additional abnormalities from developing in your esophagus.

7. What if the report mentions “gastric cardiac-type mucosa?”

The “cardia” is the area of the stomach right where the esophagus enters the stomach.

8. What does it mean if it also says that the cardiac-type mucosa has inflammation?

*Injuries such as acid from the stomach and infection by *H. pylori*, the bacteria that causes gastritis (irritation of the stomach), can cause inflammation in this area.*