

What is Upper GI Endoscopy?

An upper GI endoscopy is an examination of the upper gastrointestinal tract, from your throat down to the beginning of the small intestine. This procedure lets your doctor or gastroenterologist see a detailed view of your entire upper digestive tract to correctly diagnose or treat any problems you may be having.

The digestive tract is the system in your body that takes in food, absorbs its nutrients and gets rid of waste. When food enters the upper part of your digestive system it travels down your esophagus and into your stomach, where acids and digestive juices mix it up and break it down. The food then travels to the beginning of the small intestine called the duodenum. In the small intestine the food is broken down further and absorbed.

Your doctor will use a long, thin flexible tube called a 'video endoscope' to see inside your upper digestive tract. Various controls allow your doctor to move the scope around curves, showing a complete picture of your upper digestive system.

The endoscope has a tiny camera and light on one end that sends pictures back to a video screen. Your doctor will watch the video screen to look for inflammation (redness or irritation), ulcers, bleeding, polyps or growths, and other changes, including changes in the esophagus. If your doctor sees any of these abnormalities he can use tools passed through the end of the scope to repair damage or take tissue samples.

There are a variety of reasons why your doctor will recommend you have an upper GI endoscopy. Some of these include reflux symptoms, like a burning sensation in the throat or chest, or Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD), Barrett's esophagus, a change in the lining of the esophagus, upper abdominal pain, anorexia and weight loss, difficulty swallowing, persistent nausea or vomiting, upper GI bleeding, anemia if an upper GI source is suspected, screening for veins in the esophagus and stomach in patients with liver disease, removal of foreign bodies, and feeding tube placement.

"The procedure is very safe; the risks are a sore throat." – Doctor

An endoscopy is a safe procedure and complications are rare but can occur. Possible complications include perforation or tearing of the tissue being examined, bleeding, aspiration; fluid going into the lungs, or you may have a reaction to the sedative medication.

Make sure you tell your doctor about any allergies you have, especially ones to medications.

Most patients and doctors feel the benefits of an endoscopy far outweigh the risks.

Having an upper GI endoscopy will help your doctor to identify any problems in your upper digestive track, so you can get treatment or they can stop it before it becomes serious.