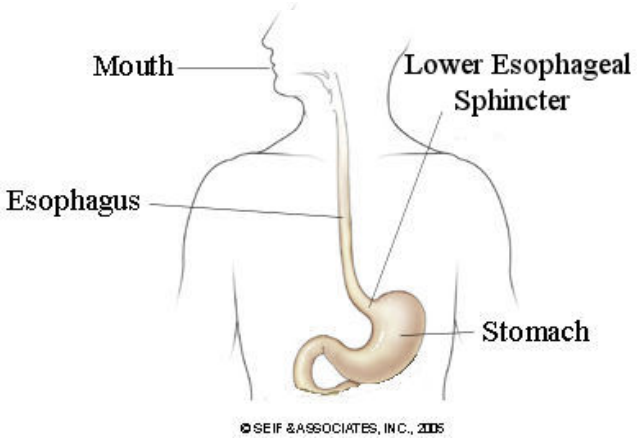
Achalasia

Achalasia is a condition in which a person cannot get food through the lower *esophagus.* This is the tube that carries food from your mouth to your stomach. This happens because there are no nerves to the lower esophagus and the *esophageal sphincter.* This is the circular muscle between the stomach and esophagus that relaxes to allow food into the stomach. It then contracts to keep food in the stomach. This absence of nerves may be present since birth. This condition causes difficulty swallowing, chest pain, and food coming back up in the mouth after being swallowed.



DIAGNOSIS (HOW DO YOU TELL WHAT IS WRONG)

This condition is diagnosed by x-ray, pressure studies in the esophagus, and *endoscopy.* This is when your caregiver looks into your esophagus with a small flexible telescope. The portion of the esophagus above the narrowing is usually enlarged when the condition is present.

TREATMENT

- Soft diets are helpful.
- Medications will help the food pass more easily into the stomach.
- If conservative treatment (as above) does not work, stretching the end of the esophagus with a balloon may help.
- Sometimes surgical treatment is used and a segment of esophagus is removed.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL ATTENTION IF:

- You are unable to keep fluids down or it feels as though food sticks in your chest area.
- Vomiting becomes persistent.
- Chest or belly pain develops, increases, or localizes.
- You develop an oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C) for over 3 days.

If problems are continuing and not allowing you to live a normal life style, talk with your caregiver and discuss medical means to help this.

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