

Medical News

Disease with No Known Symptoms

Meet a Face behind Barrett's Esophagus

Steven Berg, age 56, was diagnosed two years ago with Barrett's esophagus, which has no known symptoms. He learned that Barrett's could increase his risk of esophageal cancer, which is why he turned to gastroenterologist Mark Silversmith, MD, who practices at Catholic Medical Center.



Danielle Gagnon, RN & Mark Silversmith, MD prep Steven Berg for the non-invasive procedure to treat Barrett's.

What is Barrett's?

Barrett's is a condition in which the tissue in the esophagus turns into the tissue from the intestinal lining. The only known sign of Barrett's is gastroesophageal reflux disease or GERD, sometimes referred to as acid reflux or heartburn.

Silversmith recommends that after two years of GERD symptoms, patients contact their doctor for an endoscopy. That is how Steven knew he should be tested for Barrett's. "For 20 or so years I had acid reflux. I used over-the-counter antacids to try to manage my symptoms," said Berg

What are my treatment options?

Doctors may have different approaches to treatment depending on the level of dysplasia. Dysplasia is the irregular growth of tissue as a result of abnormal cell development, which is considered a pre-cancerous condition.

Routine endoscopies monitor the development and progression of Barrett's. Originally, Steven was given medication to help with his GERD, but during a routine



The picture shown on the left is an image of an esophagus with Barrett's. The healthy, pink tissue is overrun by red, intestinal tissue.



The picture shown on the right is of a healthy esophagus.

endoscopy, Silversmith identified signs of Barrett's and made the diagnosis. Steven had high-grade dysplasia, which is a very aggressive form of Barrett's. Silversmith and Steven decided to treat with radiofrequency ablation.

Radiofrequency ablation is a non-invasive procedure that usually takes less than 20 minutes. The procedure consists of sampling the tissue of the esophageal wall, followed by the burning of the intestinal tissue in the esophagus that appears to be Barrett's. The removed tissue is replaced by new, healthy, pink tissue. This may be done twice in the 20-minute period. The treatment takes, on average, two to four sessions a few months apart.

Immediately after the procedure, the patient is able to leave the hospital with little or no discomfort. This is Steven's second treatment, he understands what he can and cannot eat. "You would think that going home and eating something cold would feel good, but no way," he said. "Anything cold or hot can be really painful."

Steven plans to follow doctor's orders and opt for soft, room temperature foods for a few days. It is also encouraged that lifestyle choices be adjusted after the procedures. People facing an increased risk for cancer can reduce their susceptibility by quitting smoking, eating a balanced diet and reducing alcohol consumption.

To make sure his new esophageal tissue will not be damaged by stomach acid, Steven plans to change his food and beverage choices. "I need to avoid caffeine, chocolate, alcohol and spicy foods," he said. Steven will also have to be careful about what time of day he eats. "You can't eat right before you go to bed, that is really bad," he said. ■■