

## Esophageal spasm

### Definition

Esophageal spasms are abnormal contractions of the muscles in the esophagus, the tube that carries food from the mouth to the stomach. These spasms do not move food effectively to the stomach.

### Alternative Names

Diffuse esophageal spasm; Spasm of the esophagus; Distal esophageal spasm; Nutcracker esophagus

### Causes

The cause of esophageal spasm is unknown. Very hot or very cold foods may trigger spasms in some people.

### Symptoms

Symptoms may include:

- Problems swallowing or pain with swallowing
- Pain in the chest or upper abdomen

It can be hard to tell a spasm from angina pectoris, a symptom of heart disease. The pain may spread to the neck, jaw, arms, or back

### Exams and Tests

Tests you may need to look for the condition include:

- Esophagogastroduodenoscopy (EGD)
- Esophageal manometry
- Esophagogram (barium swallow x-ray)

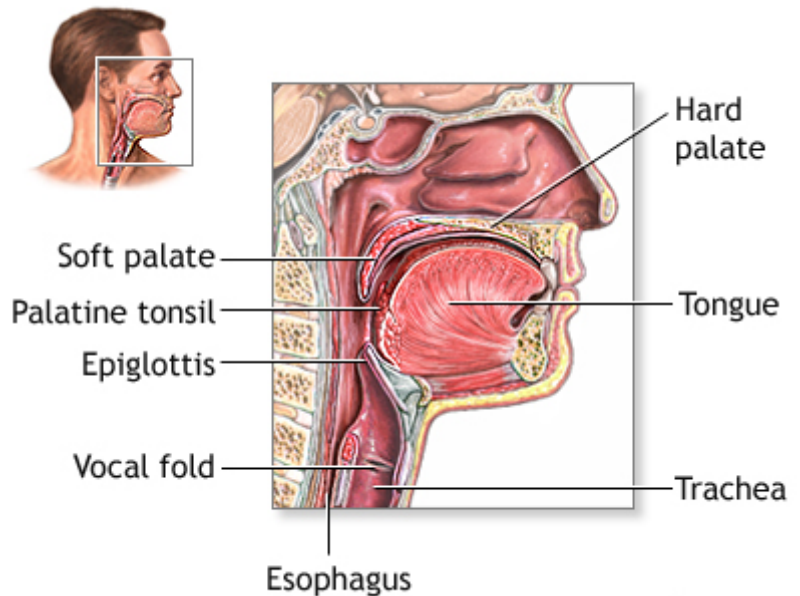
### Treatment

Nitroglycerin given under the tongue (sublingual) may help a sudden episode of esophageal spasm. Long-acting nitroglycerin and calcium channel blockers are also used for the problem.

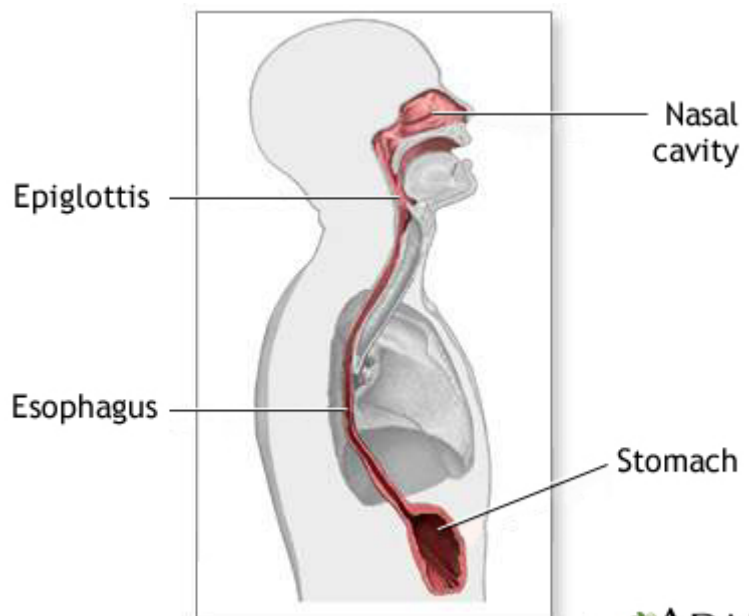
Long-term (chronic) cases are sometimes treated with low-dose antidepressants such as trazodone or nortriptyline to reduce symptoms.

Rarely, severe cases may need dilation (widening) of the esophagus or surgery to control symptoms.

### Outlook (Prognosis)



ADAM.



ADAM.

An esophageal spasm may come and go (intermittent) or last for a long time (chronic). Medicine can help relieve symptoms.

### **Possible Complications**

The condition may not respond to treatment.

### **When to Contact a Medical Professional**

Call your health care provider if you have symptoms of esophageal spasm that don't go away. The symptoms may actually be due to heart problems. Your provider can help decide if you need heart tests.

### **Prevention**

Avoid very hot or very cold foods if you get esophageal spasms.

### **References**

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