

# Tunnel of Grub

Think nine inches long and cylindrical. Then get your mind out of the gutter and up to the gullet. The esophagus is a tube that connects your throat to your stomach, pushing food on its way. Some easy-to-swallow lingo:

June 1, 2004 By David Gelman, MD

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**Esophagitis** will give you a pain in the neck or chest just after swallowing (itis means inflamed). In HIVers, especially those with CD4 counts below 100, the usual cause is the yeast infection *Candida*. If antifungal treatment doesn't help, an upper endoscopy (EGD) can slide a camera down the hatch to see what's going on (and take biopsies). It finds esophageal pests, both infectious (like herpes and CMV—treated with antivirals) and noninfectious (like an ulcer).

**GERD (gastroesophageal reflux disease)** is a \$10 word for heartburn: Stomach contents leap back up into the esophagus, a common problem even in neggies. It hurts—and scarfing large meals; lying down right after eating; smoking; or eating mints, chocolate or spicy foods make it worse. If the urge to GERD hits more than twice a week, lasts for hours or doesn't respond to over-the-counter treatment like antacids, tell your doctor. HIVers with lipodystrophy's extra belly fat may be especially vulnerable, because that can increase pressure and reflux. The best treatment involves stomach-acid combatants (Prilosec and its cousins), but first make sure your HIV meds play well with them.

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