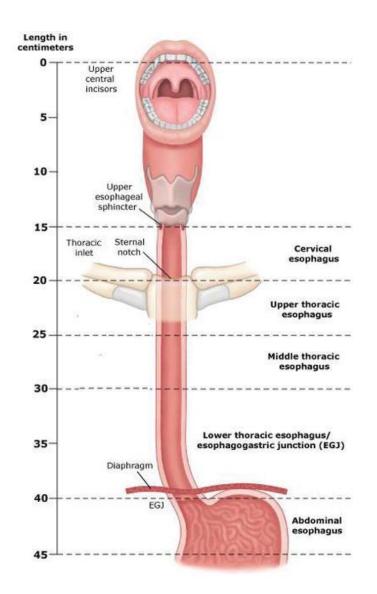
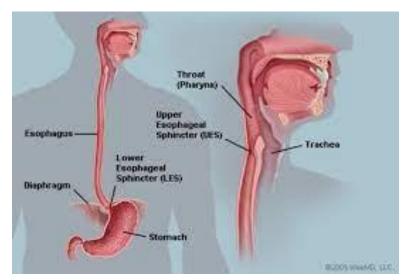
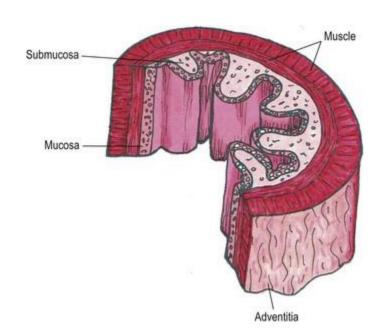


The Esophagus

• The esophagus is a muscular tube connecting the throat (pharynx) with the stomach. The esophagus is about 8 inches long and is lined by moist pink tissue called mucosa. The esophagus runs behind the windpipe (trachea) and heart, and in front of the spine. Just before entering the stomach, the esophagus passes through the diaphragm.

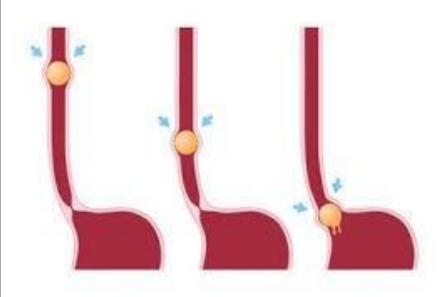






Diagrams of the Esophagus

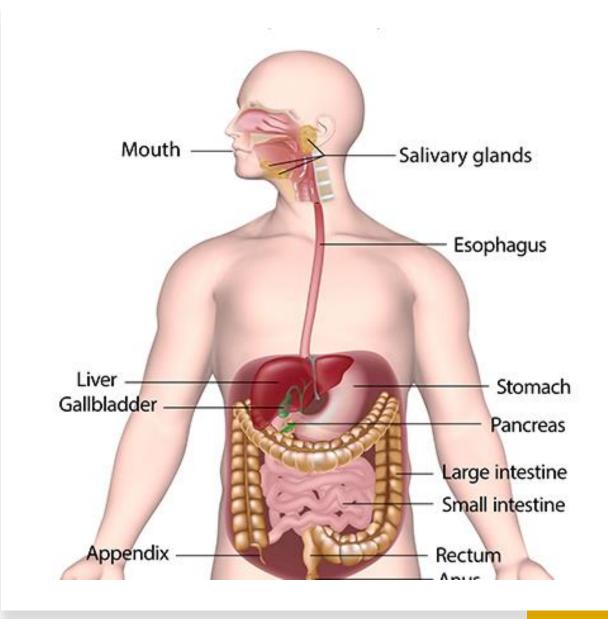
The Function of the Esophagus



The esophagus serves to pass food and liquids from the mouth down to the stomach. This is accomplished by periodic contractions (peristalsis) instead of gravity. With vomiting, these contractions are reversed, allowing stomach contents to be returned to the mouth to spit out.

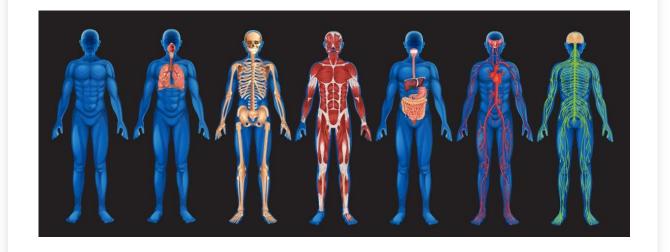
What organ system does your organ belong to?

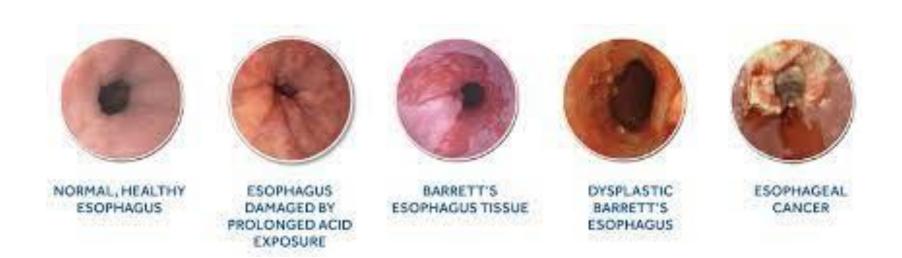
 The esophagus is part of the digestive **system.** The digestive system is made up of the gastrointestinal tract—also called the GI tract or digestive tract and the <u>liver</u>, <u>pancreas</u>, gallbladder. The GI tract is a series of hollow organs joined in a long, twisting tube from the mouth to the anus. The hollow organs that make up the GI tract are the mouth, esophagus, stomach, small intestine, large intestine, and anus. The liver, pancreas, and gallbladder are the solid organs of the digestive system.



What are some other systems that interact with your organ's system and how?

The digestive system, the circulatory system, and the muscular system work together and process and obtain nutrients from food. The skeletal system, the endocrine system, and the lymphatic system also work with the digestive system and process those nutrients. Food enters the body through the digestive system.





What are some conditions related to your organ?

- The word esophagus is derived from the Greek word 'oisophagos' which means 'gullet'. When a person swallows' food, it enters the pharynx (throat behind the nasal cavity and mouth) and into the esophagus.
- When food leaves the esophagus after being swallowed it enters into the stomach to continue along the digestive tract.
- Saliva, which is added to food when you chew, acts as a lubricant to make it easier for food to pass through the esophagus. Saliva also helps to break food down.
- When stomach acid makes its way back up through the lower esophageal sphincter into the esophagus, the esophagus can become inflamed and painful.
- When the esophagus becomes inflamed it is a condition called esophagitis. This can be caused by acid reflux, food allergies, infections, irritating or corrosive substances, and medications.
- In some cases, esophageal cancer develops when the tissues in the esophagus become cancerous.
- Humans are not the only ones to have an esophagus. Animals, fish, reptiles and birds have an esophagus.
- When a person has trouble swallowing, they may have oropharyngeal dysphagia. When this occurs, they may cough or choke during the first stage of swallowing their food. It can feel like it is stuck before reaching the stomach.
- GERD is gastroesophageal reflux disease. This occurs when gastric contents move back up
 into the esophagus after reaching the stomach. Because the acids in the stomach are too
 strong for the esophagus it can lead to bleeding, ulcers, and sometimes cancer if not
 treated.
- Although it is rare, the esophagus can be torn. It is more common with dry heaves or frequent vomiting but can occur if a sharp object is accidentally ingested.
- It takes about 7 seconds for food to travel through the esophagus into the stomach.
- There are muscles in the esophagus that work like waves to move food along. These
 muscles work so well that if you were eating upside down, they would still move the food in
 the right direction. This is called peristalsis.
- The average person's salivary glands create about 1.5 liters of saliva every day. Most of it goes through the esophagus.
- To help keep the esophagus healthy or to help it heal if GERD has developed, it's best to eat smaller meals, avoid caffeine, alcohol, carbonated beverages, quit smoking, lose weight if needed, and sit up for a while after eating.

Three Fun Facts About the Esophagus