Esophageal Spasms (Diffuse Esophageal Spasms DES)

What it is:
Diffuse esophageal spasm is when the esophageal muscles spasm shut, which closes the esophagus.

Symptoms:
The spasming of the esophageal muscles can lead to a feeling of food sticking, food obstructing, regurgitation, and chest pain. Symptoms may be worse with cold foods or drinks, but may improve with warm liquids.

Diagnosis:
Diagnostic testing requires at least 2 esophageal tests:
1. Endoscopy: sedated exam with a flexible camera scope to assess the esophagus directly.
2. Esophageal manometry: a nasal passed esophageal tube that measures esophageal muscle strength and looks for spasming.

Prognosis:
There is not a cure for DES, though most cases of DES become stable or improve with treatment. About 10% of DES can worsen which may require surgery to open up the lower esophageal valve.

Treatment:
Treatment for Diffuse Esophageal Spasm is:

a) Treat for acid reflux with medicine that suppresses acid (PPI) and anti-reflux lifestyle measures.
b) Drink warm liquids for trouble swallowing, chest pain, and with meals.
c) If trouble swallowing or food sticking is the primary symptom, esophageal muscle relaxing medicines can be tried. Nitroglycerin can be used for symptoms that come and go. Diltiazem can be used for more constant symptoms.
d) If chest pain is the primary symptom, then medicines to regulate the nerve sensations are used, namely Amitriptyline or Desipramine.
e) Changing eating habits to eat softer and more liquid foods. These foods will tend to slide down the esophagus easier. Problem foods such as grisly meats, dry foods, or raw vegetables and fruits should be eaten with care.
f) In rare cases, surgery is required to break esophageal muscle spasming.

Follow Up:
Follow up depends on the treatment program. In most cases, follow up will be 3 months after starting medicines. Patients need to track their trouble with eating, drinking, and changes in weight, chest pain, or regurgitation.