

## **Tips on avoiding Esophageal Cancer**

Esophageal cancer is a common disease in Hong Kong. Around 500 new cases are reported every year and males are prone to have esophageal cancer. The cause of the disease is still unknown, but smoking, heavy alcohol use and high intake of preserved food are some of the risk factors. There are 2 kinds of esophageal cancer, including squamous cell carcinoma and adenocarcinoma. Squamous cell carcinoma is mainly caused by smoking and heavy alcohol use, while adenocarcinoma is related to Barrett's esophagus, resulting from gastroesophageal reflux disease.

Esophageal cancer is asymptomatic in the early stage, but its symptoms will be found when the tumour gradually grows, including difficulty in swallowing, coughing, burning pain in chest and weight loss, etc. Patients with esophageal cancer can only take liquid diet or soft food for meal. An increased risk of pneumonia may be also existed in the advanced stage. If any symptoms are found, there are several methods for screening esophageal cancer, including endoscopy, CT scans and esophageal endoscopic ultrasound.

Treatments for esophageal cancer include surgery, radiotherapy and chemotherapy. Even patients in advanced stage underwent the surgery; but they still had difficulty in swallowing. Hence, some approaches will be provided for them to keep the esophagus without obstruction, such as the installation of self-expandable metallic stents, laser therapy and drug injection. Those approaches can help those patients to eat again, so that food and saliva can be gone through the esophagus.

To prevent esophageal cancer, balanced diet and healthy lifestyle are highly recommended. People should also quit smoking and stop drinking alcoholic. Preserved food and food with nitrosamine should be avoided. Regular body check-up can help for its early detection.