

## THE PROBLEM

The oesophagus (gullet) is an important part of the digestive system, taking food and drink to the stomach. A problem with the gullet therefore needs treatment – maybe by medicines, stretching it a little, placing a tube (stent) inside it or taking it out. Whatever the treatment or the cause, the problems affect us fundamentally because the basic function of eating is not as it should be, and that can affect our weight, strength, taste, habits and enjoyment of life.

## WHO WE ARE

The Oesophageal Patients Association is a national registered charity and was formed in 1985 when a few former oesophageal cancer patients met and found tremendous reassurance in sharing experiences. The members of the Association are all patients who have experienced oesophageal or gastric difficulties. We have prepared **medically approved booklets** and **fact sheets** on the problems, which we can talk about at first hand, understanding the fears that can be generated, the pains that can be suffered and the effects on the digestive system that can be experienced.

## WHAT WE DO

Our objectives are to help new patients and their families to cope with any difficulties arising as a result of treatment, giving support and encouraging them to achieve a good quality of life. This is done by providing information leaflets on matters of concern, a telephone support line, arranging patient support meetings around the UK and, where possible, visiting patients in hospital or making contact during their convalescence.

Patients may be referred by other agencies, such as Cancerbackup, doctors or specialist nurses anywhere in the UK and can be helped by telephone on the National Helpline or put in touch with a trained former patient where possible. Talking about the problems with someone who knows what they are like (perhaps rather better than the doctor) can be a great relief and there is time to deal with all the questions that seemed too trivial to mention to the doctor or were forgotten at the time.

The Association is represented on various committees involved with the management of upper GI cancers and research into new treatments. Patient involvement is increasingly recognised as a valuable input to the thinking and documentation on such matters.

## MEDICAL SUPPORT

The Association is an independent registered charity with links to specialist hospitals and medical teams around the UK where oesophageal and gastric problems are regularly treated. The teams involving Upper Gastrointestinal surgeons, thoracic surgeons, gastroenterologists, oncologists, dieticians and physiotherapists have extensive experience of treatments and provide continual support and advice to the Association.

## MEETINGS

Informal meetings for patients and carers (family or friends) are regularly held in regional centres around the UK. Problems are aired and suggestions for overcoming them are exchanged. The essential aim is to enable new patients to meet and talk to former patients who have recovered, are back to work if not retired, and lead relatively normal lives. If you have not already met a former patient member of the Association and would like to talk to and meet with others please telephone the Helpline number given below or your local contact if named overleaf.

## INFORMATION

Booklets entitled-

- ***A Guide to Life After Oesophageal/Gastric Surgery***
- ***Swallowing – Nutrition When It's Difficult*** (for those not having an operation but perhaps having a stent inserted or other treatments)

are available to patients on request. There is no charge to individuals and no membership subscription. The Association is supported entirely by donations.

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**Helpline Tel: 0121 704 9860 9.00am – 5.00pm Monday - Friday**  
Answerphone for out of hours callers

Web site: [www.opa.org.uk](http://www.opa.org.uk)

email: [opa@ukgateway.net](mailto:opa@ukgateway.net)

Chairman – David Kirby OBE

## FUNDRAISING

It costs the Oesophageal Patients Association over £230 per day to run the national telephone helpline, provide regional meetings, train volunteers and produce our support literature.

We make no charge to patients or their families for any support and advice provided. The OPA can only maintain its vital service through donations and other fundraising activities generated by the community it serves.

If you can support the work of the OPA at this time we would be indebted to you.

Cheques should be made payable to The OPA.

### **Gift Aid**

If you are an income tax payer, you may wish to ask for gift aid to be applied to your donation. This will enable the OPA to recover tax on this and any future donations you may make, at no additional cost to you on the understanding that you should pay income tax or capital gains tax equal to the tax reclaimed by the OPA on the donation in that tax year.

Please contact Mark Reynolds, Fundraising Co-ordinator by email or telephone (see overleaf) and a gift aid form will be sent to you.

*Your local patient contact is:-*



***'former patients  
helping new patients'***

**THE OESOPHAGEAL  
PATIENTS ASSOCIATION**

***OESOPHAGEAL AND GASTRIC CANCER SUPPORT***  
Registered Charity No. 1062461

**National Helpline**

**0121 704 9860**