

LUNG CANCER MINI-SERIES #1

What Is Lung Cancer?

Lung cancer is an abnormal, uncontrolled growth of cells within the lung. Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths in the United States and will cause more deaths this year than cancer of the breast, prostate, colon, liver, or kidney and melanoma combined.



What are the causes of lung cancer?

The major causes of lung cancer include:

- smoking
- radon, or asbestos exposure
- exposure to second-hand smoke (smoke from others)
- genetic factors (lung cancer that occurs in families)
- air pollution

Both smokers and non-smokers can get lung cancer. Smoking is the #1 reason people get lung cancer. In fact, of those with lung cancer, 85% currently smoke or have smoked in the past. If you smoke, your chance of getting lung cancer increases the more you smoke and the longer you have smoked. If you smoke, talk to your healthcare provider about strategies and resources to help you quit.

What are the symptoms of lung cancer?

Symptoms of lung cancer can vary from person to person. You may have no symptoms at all or you may feel like you have a bad chest cold that does not get better. If you have any of the following symptoms, speak with your health care provider:

- cough that gets worse or does not go away
- more trouble breathing (shortness of breath)

than usual

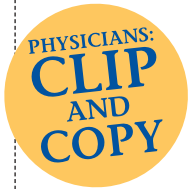
- coughing up blood
- chest pain
- hoarse voice
- frequent lung infections
- feeling tired all the time
- weight loss for no known reason
- swelling of your face or arms

Can I take a test to see if I have lung cancer?

Unfortunately, there is not a good way to find out if you have lung cancer in its early stages. Usually your health care provider will run tests only after you have symptoms that suggest lung cancer.

Tests for lung cancer *can* include:

- a chest x-ray that can help to identify “spots” that could be cancerous
- chest “CT” scan (*computerized tomography*) that can help identify “spots” that could be cancerous
- sputum tests to check for cancer cells. (This is a simple, but not a very accurate test, that looks at sputum (mucus) from your lungs)
- lung biopsy to check for cancer cells in or around the lung(s)



What does it mean to be “high risk” or “low risk” for having lung cancer?

If you are experiencing symptoms that may be from lung cancer or have a strong family history of lung cancer, you may be considered “high risk” for having lung cancer. If you are in the “high risk” category, your healthcare provider may recommend that you have a CT scan, which can discover early lung cancer.

If you have no symptoms and no family history of lung cancer, you may be considered “low risk” for having lung cancer. If you are in the “low risk” category, screening for lung cancer with a CT scan or any other test is not currently recommended by any major medical society. CT scans can find spots (nodules) on the lung that may look like cancer, but are not cancer. If a spot is found on the lung, you may need surgery to prove that the spot is not cancer. Many times (40-50% of the time), the spot is not cancer and you have had lung surgery to remove an area of the lung that was not harmful.

Is there more than one type of lung cancer?

Lung cancers are generally divided into two major types, *small cell lung cancer* and *non-small cell lung cancer*. Small cell cancer tends to grow more quickly than non-small cell cancer.

What does “staging” of lung cancer mean?

Staging is a way of describing the size of your cancer, if the cancer has entered your lymph nodes, and how far your cancer has spread. Knowing the stage of lung cancer guides your health care team on how to best treat your cancer.

How is lung cancer treated?

Treatments for lung cancer that are currently available include:

- surgery
- chemotherapy
- radiation therapy

- *targeted therapy* (*Targeted therapy* is a relatively new type of drug treatment for lung cancer. Drugs are used that “target” the cancer and prevent the cancer from growing)
- a combination of therapies may also be used

Your specific treatment plan will depend on the type of cancer, the stage, as well as your personal needs and preferences. It is important to ask your health care providers about which treatments are available for your specific cancer so that you can work together as a team to decide the best treatment for you. You may also ask if enrolling in a research study may be a good option for the treatment of your cancer.

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For more information regarding lung cancer:

American Cancer Society. 1-800-227-2345

http://www.cancer.org/docroot/LRN/LRN_0.asp

National Cancer Institute. 1-800-422-6237

<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/types/lung>

Lung Cancer Alliance. 1-800-298-2436

www.lungcanceralliance.org

Also look for additional topics on lung cancer in this mini-series

Rx Action Steps

- ✓ If you smoke, stop smoking
- ✓ Avoid second-hand smoke
- ✓ Consider having your home checked for radon
- ✓ See your health care provider if you:
 - have a cough that will not go away
 - cough up blood
 - are more short of breath than usual
 - lose weight without trying
 - develop a hoarse voice for more than 2 weeks
 - feel tired all of the time

Doctor's Office Telephone:
