American Cancer Society

Lung Cancer Fact Sheet

for Patients and Caregivers

Lung cancer is the second most common cancer and the leading cause of cancer death in the US. There are different kinds of lung cancer. The two most common types are non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC) and small cell lung cancer (SCLC).

Risk Factors

Smoking tobacco continues to be the leading cause of lung cancer. This includes cigarettes, cigars, and pipes. Low-tar and "light" cigarettes increase the risk of lung cancer as much as regular cigarettes.

But not all people who get lung cancer smoke now or in the past. In fact, some people who get lung cancer never smoked. There are other risk factors for getting lung cancer.

Some risk factors for lung cancer can be changed. These include smoking tobacco, breathing in secondhand smoke from other people who use tobacco, or being exposed to cancer-causing chemicals like radon and asbestos.

Other risk factors can't be changed. These include personal or family history, having been treated with radiation therapy to the chest, and being exposed to air pollution.

Prevention

Not all lung cancers can be prevented. And some people who get lung cancer do not have any known risk factors. But there are ways a person can help lower their risk:

- Don't use any tobacco products.
- Stay away from secondhand smoke.
- Keep cars and homes smoke-free.
- Avoid or limit exposure to cancer-causing chemicals in your home or workplace.
- Follow a healthy eating pattern that includes plenty of fruits and vegetables.

Screening

Screening looks for cancer in people who don't have symptoms. Lung cancer screening can reduce the risk of death if you are at high risk.

The American Cancer Society recommends yearly lung cancer screening with a low-dose CT (LDCT) scan for people ages 50 to 80 years who have at least a 20 pack-year history of smoking. Pack-years are the number of cigarette packs smoked per day times the number of years a person has smoked.

If you might be at higher risk of lung cancer, talk to a health care provider about the possible benefits, limits, and risks of lung cancer screening.

Signs and Symptoms

Most lung cancers do not cause symptoms until they have spread outside the lungs. Some common signs and symptoms of lung cancer include:

- A cough that does not go away or gets worse
- Coughing up blood or rust-colored spit or phlegm
- Chest pain that is often worse with deep breathing, coughing, or laughing
- Hoarse voice
- Loss of appetite
- Losing weight without trying
- Wheezing or shortness of breath
- Feeling tired or weak
- Infections such as bronchitis and pneumonia that don't go away or keep coming back

Treatment

Treatment for lung cancer depends on several things such as the type and extent of the cancer, the person's age, other health problems, and what the person with cancer prefers. Also, special testing might be done on the tumor to choose the best treatment. If you have lung cancer, talk to your doctor about the best treatment for you.

Living With Lung Cancer

Having lung cancer affects a person's quality of life. Physical, social, mental health, spiritual, and money issues can come up at any time during and after treatment. Some people may feel, or be made to feel, that it's their fault that they got lung cancer. This can add to their stress and worry.

People with lung cancer may be helped by palliative care at any time. Palliative care focuses on helping manage symptoms, address issues, and improve quality of life.

Good communication between a person with cancer and their health care team is important. This should include:

- Asking and answering questions
- Working together to set care goals
- Making shared decisions
- Managing side effects and other issues
- Scheduling follow-up tests and care

Visit the American Cancer Society website at **cancer.org/cancer/lung-cancer** or call us at **1-800-227-2345** to learn more. We're here when you need us.

©2025, American Cancer Society, Inc.
No.080765 Rev. 1/25
Models used for illustrative purposes only.

BBB ACCREDITED CHARITY
bbb.org/charity