After a Lung Cancer Diagnosis

Lung cancer is a type of cancer that starts in the lungs. The lungs are a pair of sponge-like organs found in your chest that bring air in and out of the body. They take in oxygen and get rid of carbon dioxide, a waste product. If you have been told you have lung cancer, you've probably already had x-rays, scans, and a biopsy (a test that takes some tissue to check for cancer). Other tests might have been done on the cancer cells to check for certain proteins and gene changes called biomarkers. You might also have other procedures to find out if the cancer has spread. These tests help your doctor know what type of lung cancer you have, what stage it is, and what treatment might help.

Treatment for lung cancer

Your treatment will depend on the type and stage of your lung cancer. Your treatment options will also depend on the results of tests on the cancer cells, your health, and your personal preferences.

There are many ways to treat lung cancer, including surgery, radiation, and medicines such as chemo, targeted drug therapy, or immunotherapy. In many cases, more than one type of treatment is needed. Your doctor will help you decide which treatments are best for you.

Be sure to ask:

- What is the goal of treatment?
- What type of lung cancer do I have?
- What stage is my lung cancer, and what does that mean? What were the biomarker test results?
- What else have you learned about my lung cancer from my test results?
- Will I need more tests?
- Will I need surgery? Can the cancer be removed completely?

What to expect before and during treatment

Your cancer care team will explain your treatment plan to you. This team may include different doctors, nurses, and other health care workers, depending on the type of treatment you need. For example, if you need radiation therapy, you will work with a radiation oncologist to know what to expect before, during, and after radiation treatment. If you need other types of treatment, your cancer care team will explain how it is given, help you get ready for it, keep track of how you're doing, and help you with any side effects.

You might also get blood tests, scans, or other tests at certain times to see how well your treatment is working.

Not everyone going through treatment for lung cancer will have the same side effects. For example, the side effects of surgery are different from the side effects of chemo, targeted drug therapy, immunotherapy, or radiation treatment. And people getting the same treatment might have different side effects.

Be sure to ask:

- What are my treatment options? What do you think is best for me and why?
- Are there any clinical trials for my type of cancer?
- What side effects might I have, and what can I do about them?
- How will we know if the treatment is working?
- How often will I get treatment? How long will it last?
- Where will I go to get treatment? Can I drive myself?
- Will I be able to keep doing my usual activities, like work and exercise?

What to expect after treatment

After treatment, ask your cancer doctor for a treatment summary and follow-up plan. This is called a survivorship care plan. Your cancer doctor will work with your family or primary care doctor to help manage side effects from treatment and check your general health. You will have regular tests to check if your cancer has come back, or to check if a new cancer has started in a different part of your body.

For some people, the cancer might not go away completely. They might continue to get treatment, and tests will still be needed to see how well it's working.

You might be faced with changes to your body after treatment. For example, your lungs might not work as well as they did before. If trouble breathing limits what you can do, ask your cancer care team if pulmonary rehabilitation or pulmonary therapy might help. Ask your doctor what to expect and let them know if you have any problems.

People who have had lung cancer are at risk of having it again or getting certain other types of cancer. Even if you feel fine after finishing treatment, it's important to ask your cancer care team about a regular schedule for follow-up tests to check if your lung cancer has come back.

Be sure to ask:

- Where do I get a copy of my treatment summary and follow-up plan?
- How often do I need to see my cancer care team?
- When and how should I contact them?
- Will I need tests to see if my cancer has come back, or to check for problems from my treatment?
- Do I need any screening tests, like a mammogram or colonoscopy, to find other cancers early?
- Are there late or long-term side effects from treatment that I should watch for?
- Do you think that pulmonary rehabilitation or pulmonary therapy might help me?
- Where can I find my medical records after treatment?

Staying healthy

Be sure to tell your doctor or cancer care team if any treatment side effects don't go away or if you have any new symptoms.

There are things you can do to keep yourself healthy during and after treatment for lung cancer. Not smoking can help some people with lung cancer live longer. Avoiding exposure to secondhand smoke and radon in your home and workplace are also important. If you work around chemicals, check with your doctor about which you should try to avoid. Getting to and staying at a healthy weight, eating well, drinking enough fluids, being active, and avoiding alcohol can also help you stay healthy. These things can help lower your risk of getting a new lung cancer or other cancers.

Dealing with your feelings

Having lung cancer might make you feel scared, sad, or nervous. Whether you smoked or not, you might feel guilty or judged for having lung cancer. It's normal to have these feelings, and there are ways to help you cope with them.

- Don't try to deal with your feelings by yourself. Talk about your feelings, no matter what they are.
- It's OK to feel sad or down once in a while, but let your cancer care team know if you have these feelings for more than a few days.
- If your doctor says it's OK, continue doing things you enjoy like spending time outdoors, going to a movie or sporting event, or going out to dinner.
- Get help with tasks like cooking and cleaning.

You might want to reach out to friends, family, or religious leaders or groups. Counseling can also help. Some people find it helpful to talk with others who've been through the same things. A support group can offer that. Tell your cancer care team how you're feeling. They can help you find the right support.

For more information and support, visit the American Cancer Society website at cancer.org/lungcancer or call us at **1-800-227-2345**. We're here when you need us.

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