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Basic Information About Lung Cancer

Lung Cancer Basics

Lung cancer is a disease in which cells in the lungs grow out of control. Lung cancers usually are grouped into two main types called small cell and non-small cell.

What it is

Lung cancer begins in the lungs and may spread to lymph nodes or other organs in the body, such as the brain. Cancer from other organs also may spread to the lungs. When cancer cells spread from one organ to another, they are called metastases.

Types

Lung cancers usually are grouped into two main types called small cell and non-small cell (non-small cell includes adenocarcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma). These types of lung cancer grow differently and are treated differently. Non-small cell lung cancer is more common than small cell lung cancer.

Symptoms of Lung Cancer

Most people with lung cancer don't have symptoms until the cancer is advanced. People can have different symptoms for lung cancer.

Symptoms

People can have different symptoms for lung cancer. Some people have symptoms related to the lungs. Some people whose lung cancer has spread to other parts of the body (metastasized) have symptoms specific to that part of the body. Some people just have general symptoms of not feeling well. Most people with lung cancer don't have symptoms until the cancer is advanced.

Lung cancer symptoms may include:

- Coughing that gets worse or doesn't go away.
- Chest pain.
- Shortness of breath.
- Wheezing.
- Coughing up blood.
- Feeling very tired all the time.
- Weight loss with no known cause.

Other changes that can sometimes occur with lung cancer may include repeated bouts of pneumonia and swollen or enlarged lymph nodes (glands) inside the chest in the area between the lungs.

These signs and symptoms can happen with other illnesses, too. If you have some of these signs and symptoms, talk to your doctor, who can help find the cause.

Screening for Lung Cancer

The only recommended screening test for lung cancer is low-dose computed tomography (also called a low-dose CT scan, or LDCT). Lung cancer screening is recommended only for adults who are at high risk for developing the disease because of their smoking history and age.

Risk Factors

Cigarette smoking is the number one risk factor for lung cancer. Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States.

Reducing Risk for Lung Cancer

The most important thing you can do to prevent lung cancer is to not start smoking, or, if you smoke, to quit. Get your home tested for radon.

Don't smoke. Cigarette smoking causes about 80% to 90% of lung cancer deaths in the United States. The most important thing you can do to prevent lung cancer is to not start smoking, or, if you smoke, to quit.

Avoid secondhand smoke. Smoke from other people's cigarettes, cigars, or pipes is called secondhand smoke. Make your home and car smoke-free.

Get your home tested for radon. The US Environmental Protection Agency recommends that all homes be tested for radon.

Be careful at work. Follow health and safety guidelines to avoid carcinogens (things that can cause cancer).

> For more information about lung cancer, treatment, and living with lung cancer go to the [CDC Lung Cancer web page](#).

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