

Lung Cancer

What is lung cancer?

Lung cancer begins when cells in the lung grow uncontrollably and form a mass called a tumor, lesion, or nodule. There are two major types of lung cancer: non-small cell and small cell. They are usually treated in different ways. Lung cancer is the second most common cancer diagnosed in both men and women in the United States.

What is the function of the lungs?

The lungs are made up of five lobes, three in the right lung and two in the left lung. As a person inhales, the lungs absorb oxygen from the air, which is delivered to the rest of the body through the bloodstream. When the body uses the oxygen, carbon dioxide is created. It is carried back to the lungs through the bloodstream and released when a person exhales.

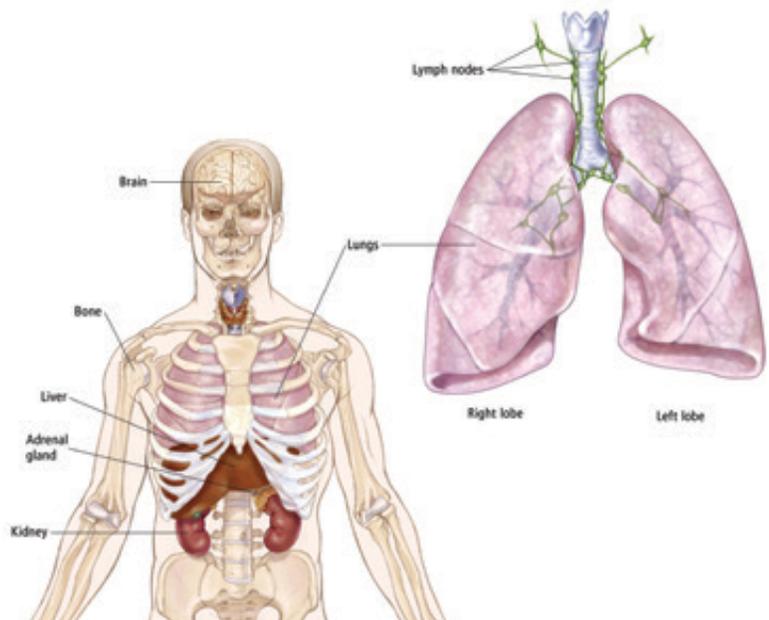


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What does stage mean?

The stage is a way of describing where the cancer is located, if or where it has spread, and whether it is affecting other parts of the body. There are five stages for lung cancer: stage 0 (zero) and stages I through IV (one through four). Descriptions and illustrations of these stages are available at www.cancer.net/lung.

How is lung cancer treated?

The treatment options for lung cancer depend on the size and location of the tumor, the type of lung cancer, whether the cancer has spread, and the person's overall health. There are four basic options for treating lung cancer: surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, and targeted therapy. Non-small cell lung cancer is often treated with a combination of these approaches. The goal of surgery is to completely remove the lung tumor with a surrounding border of healthy tissue, called a margin, and nearby lymph nodes. Small cell lung cancer is often treated with chemotherapy and/or radiation therapy. When making treatment decisions, people may also consider a clinical trial; talk with your doctor about all treatment options. The side effects of lung cancer treatment can often be prevented or managed with the help of your health care team. This is called supportive care and is an important part of the overall treatment plan.

How can I cope with lung cancer?

Absorbing the news of a cancer diagnosis and communicating with your doctor are key parts of the coping process. Seeking support, organizing your health information, making sure all of your questions are answered, and participating in the decision-making process are other steps. Talk with your health care team about any concerns. Understanding your emotions and those of people close to you can be helpful in managing the diagnosis, treatment, and healing process. Because lung cancer is often associated with smoking, patients may feel that they will not receive as much support or help from the people around them. However, lung cancer can affect anyone. Although a lung cancer diagnosis is serious, patients can be hopeful that their doctors can offer them effective treatment.

Questions to ask the doctor

Regular communication is important in making informed decisions about your health care. Consider asking the following questions of your health care team:

- What type of lung cancer do I have?
- Can you explain my pathology report (laboratory test results) to me?
- What stage is the lung cancer? What does this mean?
- Would you explain my treatment options? What clinical trials are open to me?
- What treatment plan do you recommend? Why?
- What is the goal of each treatment? Is it to eliminate the cancer, help me feel better, or both?
- Who will be part of my treatment team, and what does each member do?
- Besides treating my cancer, what can be done to manage my symptoms?
- How will this treatment affect my daily life? Will I be able to work, exercise, and perform my usual activities?
- What long-term side effects may be associated with my cancer treatment?
- If I'm worried about managing the costs related to my cancer care, who can help me with this concern?
- Where can I find emotional support for me and my family?
- Whom should I call for questions or problems?
- Is there anything else I should be asking?

Additional questions to ask the doctor can be found at www.cancer.net/lung.

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TERMS TO KNOW

Benign:

A tumor that is not cancerous

Biopsy:

Removal of a tissue sample that is then examined under a microscope to check for cancer cells

Bronchoscopy:

A procedure using a thin, flexible tube with a light on the end to examine the inside of the lungs and/or take a sample of fluid or tissue

Chemotherapy:

The use of drugs to destroy cancer cells

Lymph node:

A tiny, bean-shaped organ that fights infection

Malignant:

A tumor that is cancerous

Metastasis:

The spread of cancer from where it began to another part of the body

Oncologist:

A doctor who specializes in treating cancer

Prognosis:

Chance of recovery

Radiation therapy:

The use of high-energy x-rays to destroy cancer cells

Targeted therapy:

Treatment that targets specific genes or proteins that contribute to cancer growth and survival

Thoracotomy:

Removal of a lung tumor through an incision in the chest

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