

Family Medicine Clerkship Plain Language Summary Template

Title: Lung cancer screening: What you need to know.

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Plain Language Summary:



What is lung cancer?

The lungs are a pair of organs in your chest that collect oxygen from the air you breathe. Your windpipe connects your mouth and nose to the small tubes and air sacs that make up your lungs. These tubes and air sacs are lined with tiny cells. Lung cancer is most often the overgrowth of these cells in the lung. As these cells grow, they can decrease the function of your lungs and cause other problems. In some cases, these cancer cells can leave the lungs and travel to other organs, like the liver or brain. When this happens, it is called metastatic lung cancer.

Am I at risk of lung cancer?

Lung cancer kills more men and women every year than any other cancer. The main cause of lung cancer is cigarette smoking. The more you smoke, the higher your risk for getting lung cancer. Lung cancer can also occur in people that have never smoked. Other risk factors that increase your change of developing lung cancer are: older age, exposure to asbestos, a family history of lung cancer, radon exposure, air pollution, or radiation therapy to the chest.

What are the symptoms of lung cancer?

Most early lung cancers have no symptoms. Symptoms that may develop as the cancer grows are: a new cough, coughing up blood or rust-colored mucus, fatigue, weight loss without trying, breathing trouble or changes, or repeated lung infections. Other symptoms not related to your lungs may also develop if the cancer has spread to a different part of the body (metastatic lung cancer). Tell your doctor if you have these symptoms.

Can I be checked for lung cancer if I do not have symptoms?

Screening is looking for lung cancer before any symptoms of cancer are present. Screening people for lung cancer is **not recommended** if they do not have any symptoms. This is because until recently no screening method decreased the risk of dying from cancer. Right now, doctors and scientists around the world are studying ways to screen for lung cancer and reduce the risk of dying.

A new study in the U.S. showed that the risk of dying from lung cancer could be reduced in a certain group of smokers when they were screened using a special CT scan. More studies to confirm this finding are also going on in Europe. Ask your doctor, if he/she thinks you could be considered for this screening method.

What are the risks of screening?

The decision to screen for cancer is not as easy as it may seem. Many of the screening tests are not perfect and also come with risks. One risk is a cancer may be found but treating it will not increase the length or quality of your life. For unknown reasons, some cancers might not grow big enough to cause problems and the treatment can be more harmful than the cancer. Another risk is that the screening test might be abnormal, even if you don't have cancer. Sometime this can lead to further testing which can itself have bad side effects.

What can I do to prevent getting lung cancer?

If you are a smoker, quit smoking today! This is a best way to avoid developing lung cancer. There are many resources available for you on the Internet (see below) and through your doctor to help you quit. See your doctor for help if you develop any of the symptoms described above. If you don't have any symptoms, but are still concerned, talk to your doctor about the latest national recommendations for lung cancer screening.

For more information visit these websites:

National Cancer Institute

<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/pdq/screening/lung/Patient>

American Cancer Society

<http://www.cancer.org/cancer/lungcancer-non-smallcell/index>

PubMed Health

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0004529/>

Quit smoking today!

<http://www.smokefree.gov/>

Key Words:

Lung Cancer

Lung Cancer Screening

Low-dose computed tomography

Chest radiography

Smoking Cessation

This document was created by a medical student enrolled in the Family Medicine Clerkship at the University of Minnesota Medical School as part of the course project. The aim of the project is to present information on a medical topic in the format of a patient education handout. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Minnesota Medical School physicians and faculty. These materials are provided for informational purposes only and are in no way intended to take the place of the advice and recommendations of your personal health care provider. The information provided may no longer be up-to-date since it has not been reviewed since the date of creation. The information provided should not be used to diagnose a health problem or disease, or as a means of determining treatment. In the event of a medical emergency, immediately contact a doctor or call 911.