Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

What You Can Do To Prevent Lung Cancer

This information explains lung cancer and its symptoms. It describes the risk factors for developing lung cancer, and the eligibility factors for getting a lung cancer screening. It also gives prevention information, including how to lower your risk for lung cancer and the benefits of quitting smoking.

Know Your Risk for Lung Cancer

A risk factor is anything that increases your chance of getting a disease, such as cancer. Important risk factors for lung cancer include your age and how many years you have smoked, if any.

Lung cancer is the top cause of deaths from cancer.

Here are some other factors that may put you at risk:

- Breathing in the smoke of other people (secondhand smoke).
- Breathing in other substances that cause cancer, such as asbestos, arsenic, and exhaust from vehicles or machines.
- Having a family member related to you by blood who had or has lung cancer.
- Exposure to radon (a radioactive gas found in some homes and buildings).

Your race, sex assigned at birth, and lifestyle may also play a role in your risk of getting lung cancer. For example, Black men are more likely to get lung cancer than white men, even if their tobacco use is similar. Black women are less likely to get lung cancer than white women.

If you have any of these risk factors, talk with your healthcare provider. Learn if screening is right for you.

24 hours after quitting, your chance of a heart attack goes down.

Know the Symptoms of Lung Cancer

Most people do not have any signs of lung cancer. Sometimes the first sign of the disease is an abnormal (not normal) spot on a chest X-ray or on a CT scan you had for another reason. Talk with your healthcare provider if you feel 1 or more of these symptoms:

- Coughing that gets worse or doesn't go away.
- Shortness of breath.
- Chest pain.
- Coughing up blood.
- Losing weight without trying.
- Feeling very tired all the time.

1 year after quitting, your risk of heart disease is half that of a person who still smokes.

Improve Your Lung Health

- Don't smoke. It's the best thing you can do to help keep your lungs healthy. If you do smoke, safe and effective treatment is available.
- If possible, avoid indoor and outdoor pollutants, such as smoke, cleaning products, and mold.
- Wash your hands often to prevent getting respiratory infections. These are

infections of parts of your body involved in breathing, such as your sinuses, throat, airways, or lungs.

- Get a physical exam every year. Visiting a healthcare provider every year will help you stay healthy.
- Exercise can keep your lungs strong. Getting at least 30 minutes of activity a day 5 days a week is best for your health. Exercise includes walking, jogging, running, cleaning your home, gardening or outdoor chores, and taking the stairs.

Screening finds 8 out of 10 lung cancers earlier, when it is easier to treat.

- Get screened for lung cancer if you are between the ages of 50 and 80 and:
  - Smoke now or used to smoke.
  - Have smoked an average of 1 pack a day for 20 years or what comes out as the same number of cigarettes. For example, you could have smoked 2 packs a day for 10 years or a half pack a day for 40 years.

Take a 2-minute quiz to see if you are eligible for lung cancer screening.

- Join a tobacco treatment program to help you quit.
  - MSK's Tobacco Treatment Program has specialists who can help you quit smoking. The program is open to all people who smoke and other tobacco users. It's for people who have never had cancer or a tobacco-related disease, anyone diagnosed with cancer, and cancer survivors. The program offers treatment options to help you quit. They include counseling, telemedicine (video visit with a healthcare provider), education, and medications.

    For more information about our Tobacco Treatment Program, or to talk

with a Tobacco Treatment Specialist, call 212-610-0507.

Talk With Your Child About Smoking

- If your child is smoking, remind them of the dangers. Keep talking about it so they are comfortable discussing their health choices with you.
- Start talking to your kids early in their life during kindergarten and as they grow up. Talking to kids early can help them to say no if they are ever asked to smoke.

9 out of 10 people who smoke tried their first cigarette before they were 18 years old.

Actions You Can Take Today

- If you smoke, join a tobacco treatment program to help you quit or cut down.
- Learn about your risks for lung cancer.
- Know the symptoms of lung cancer.
- Improve your lung health with exercise and by avoiding pollutants when possible.
- If you have a child, talk with them about the dangers of smoking.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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