

Date: 5/27/2008 Patient: Elizabeth Test

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## Lung Cancer

### What is lung cancer?

Lung cancer is an abnormal growth of cells in the lungs. The 2 lungs take up much of the space in your chest. When you breathe, the lungs bring oxygen into the body and take out carbon dioxide, which is a waste product of the body's cells.

Lung cancer can spread to other parts of the body, most often to the liver, brain, bones, and other parts of the lungs, including the outer lining (called the pleura). Cancer from other parts of the body may also spread to the lungs, but it is called metastatic cancer rather than lung cancer.

Lung cancer is one of the most common forms of cancer in the US and a leading cause of cancer deaths in both men and women.

### How does it occur?

Tobacco is linked to most cases of lung cancer. In addition to smoking, factors that increase your risk for lung cancer include exposures to:

- other people's smoke (secondhand smoke, or passive smoking)
- air pollution
- radiation at your job, for medical exams, or in your environment
- asbestos
- radon gas
- industrial chemicals such as the byproducts from petroleum refining.

### What are the symptoms?

Lung cancer may grow for a while without causing symptoms. Symptoms may include:

- a cough that doesn't go away, coughing up blood, shortness of breath, wheezing, hoarseness
- chest pain, sometimes made worse by inhaling
- swelling in the neck or face
- tiredness, weakness
- loss of appetite
- unexplained weight loss.

If the cancer spreads to other parts of the body, the symptoms will depend on the area it affects.

### How is it diagnosed?

Your health care provider will review your symptoms and examine you. A sample of sputum may show if cancer cells are present. Some of the following tests also will be done:

- chest x-rays
- CT scans of your chest
- CT or other scans of other parts of your body to look for spread of the disease, such as the liver, bones, and brain
- blood tests.

If x-rays or scans show a suspicious area in the lung, a sample of cells can also be taken for testing (a biopsy). Biopsies can be done by:

- numbing the area and putting a thin needle through the chest wall
- passing a slim, flexible, lighted tube called a bronchoscope into an airway of the lung to see and sample abnormal areas (a procedure called a bronchoscopy)
- surgery to remove abnormal tissue.

Biopsies may be done of other areas affected by cancer, such as the liver, lymph glands, and skin.

## **How is it treated?**

Treatment depends on the type, size, and stage of the cancer and your own general health. If you have a single tumor with little or no spread into nearby tissues, surgery is the usual treatment. Surgery is the single best way to cure lung cancer. A part of one lung or a whole lung may need to be removed.

Unless the cancer is very small, chemotherapy for about 2 months is now recommended after surgery. Chemotherapy is treatment with anticancer drugs to kill cancer cells.

In some cases, chemotherapy and radiation therapy may be recommended instead of surgery. Radiation is usually given at the same time as chemotherapy but, in some cases, radiation is given after chemotherapy, followed by a bit more chemotherapy. Sometimes radiation needs to be given if the cancer has spread to the bones or brain. Otherwise, if the cancer has spread outside the lung, chemotherapy alone or biologic therapy is used.

When lung cancer spreads to the pleura, it may cause fluid to build up in the chest and press on the lung. The fluid can be removed with a needle, a procedure called thoracentesis.

## **What are the chances of a cure?**

About 1 of every 6 cases of lung cancer is cured.

## **How can I take care of myself?**

Follow your health care provider's recommended treatment and keep all your follow-up appointments. To help take care of yourself during your treatment and recovery, follow these guidelines:

- Do not smoke.
- Exercise according to your health care provider's recommendations.
- Eat regular, healthy meals, as recommended by your provider or dietitian.

- Get plenty of rest.
- Drink lots of liquids to keep your lung secretions moist and fluid.
- Develop a support system of people you can talk to comfortably. Ask for help at home or work when the load is too great to handle.
- Use methods to reduce stress that work for you, such as participating in recreational activities and hobbies, listening to music, or doing relaxation and deep breathing exercises.
- Discuss with your health care provider or a mental health professional the events in your life that make you anxious. Ask for help in developing ways to cope with these events.

Call your health care provider if any symptoms recur. Your provider will tell you what new signs and symptoms to watch for and when to call or make an appointment.

### **What can be done to help prevent lung cancer?**

Not all of the causes of lung cancer are known, but following these guidelines can help reduce the risk of some of the more common kinds of lung cancer:

- Do not smoke and stay away from other people's smoke. If you are a smoker, stop smoking. You will start reducing your risk of lung cancer right away.
- Stay away from environmental hazards, such as radon, and asbestos, and, when possible, severe air pollution. Use on-the-job protective equipment when it's recommended.

For more information on cancer, contact national and local organizations such as:

- American Cancer Society, Inc.  
Phone: 800-ACS-2345 (800-227-2345)  
Web site: <http://www.cancer.org>
- Cancer Information Service  
Phone: 800-4-CANCER (800-422-6237)  
Web site: <http://cis.nci.nih.gov>.

Developed by McKesson Provider Technologies.

Published by [McKesson Provider Technologies](#).

Last modified: 2006-03-01

Last reviewed: 2005-07-01

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