

Lung Cancers are Diagnosed As an Incidental Finding

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Editorial Note

When abnormal cells start growing in your lungs or air passages leading to the lungs, or bronchi, it is called lung cancer. These cells grow rapidly and form solid masses called tumors. As tumors grow and increase in number they stop your lungs from providing oxygen to your bloodstream.

Many early lung cancers are diagnosed as an incidental finding with a test for a different purpose. But when they do appear, knowing the warning signs of lung cancer may allow you to get screened earlier. Finding lung cancer early allows for more personalized treatment options, with a much better success rate. Having one of the following symptoms of lung cancer is generally not a cause for worry, but if you experience multiple symptoms for an extended amount of time, it is time to see your doctor.

The different types of lung cancer are non-small cell lung cancer and small cell lung cancer. In non-small cell lung cancer there are three main types of non-small cell lung cancer which are adenocarcinoma of the lung, squamous cell, large cell undifferentiated carcinoma. Small cell lung cancer is divided into two types, named for the kinds of cells found in the cancer and how the cells look when viewed under a microscope those are small cell carcinoma and combined small cell carcinoma.

Lung Cancer Causes

Smoking is the number one cause of lung cancer. It causes about 90 percent of lung cancer cases. Tobacco smoke contains many chemicals that are known to cause lung cancer. If you still smoke, quitting smoking is the single best thing you can do for your lung health.

Radon exposure is the second leading cause of lung cancer. Radon is a colorless, odorless radioactive gas that exists naturally in soil. It comes up through the soil and enters buildings through small gaps and cracks.

Exposure to certain hazardous chemicals poses a lung cancer risk. Working with materials such as asbestos, uranium, arsenic, cadmium, chromium, nickel and some petroleum products is especially dangerous.

Particle pollution refers to a mix of very tiny solid and liquid particles that are in the air we breathe. Evidence shows that particle pollution like that coming from that exhaust smoke increases the risk of lung cancer.

Genetic factors also may play a role in ones chances of developing lung cancer. A family history of lung cancer may mean you are at a higher risk of getting the disease. If others in your family have or ever had lung cancer, it's important to mention this to your doctor.

Stages

The staging of cancer describes how far it has spread through the body and how severe it is. Staging helps healthcare professionals and individuals decide on a suitable course of treatment. The most basic form of staging is as related to localized, wherein the cancer is within a limited area. Regional, wherein the cancer has spread to nearby tissues or lymph nodes and distant, wherein the cancer has spread to other parts of the body.

There are also specific ways of staging non-small cell and small cell lung cancer. Occult or hidden in this stage the cancer does not show up on imaging scans, but cancerous cells might appear in the phlegm or mucus.

In the initial stage there are abnormal cells only in the top layers of cells lining the airways. At first stage tumor is present in the lung, but it is 4 cm or under and has not spread to other parts of the body. In second stage the tumor is 7 cm or under and might have spread to nearby tissues and lymph nodes. The third stage of cancer has spread to lymph nodes and reached other parts of the lung and surrounding area. For the fourth stage the cancer has spread to distant body parts, such as the bones or brain.

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