

ASCO ANSWERS

LUNG CANCER

WHAT IS LUNG CANCER?

Lung cancer begins when cells in the lung grow out of control and form a tumor. 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.

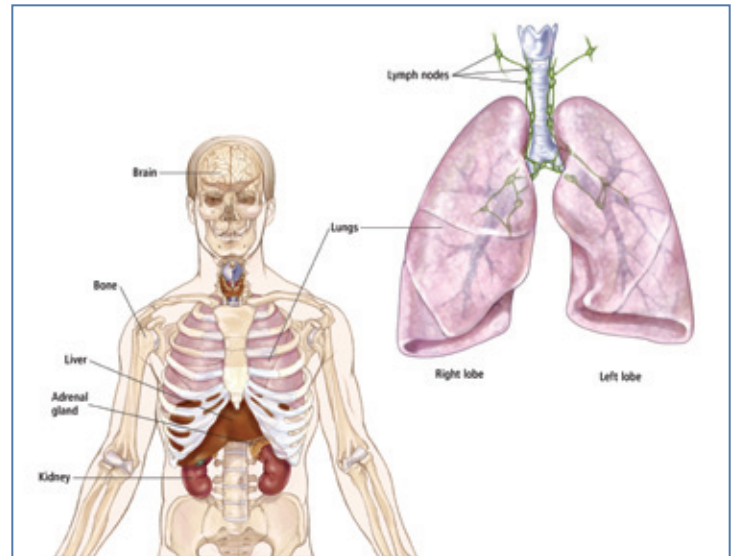


Illustration by Robert Morale/Visual Explanations, LLC. © 2004 American Society of Clinical Oncology.

Find additional cancer information at www.cancer.net.

WHAT DOES STAGE MEAN?

The stage is a way of describing the cancer, such as where it is located, if or where it has spread, and if it is affecting the functions of other organs in the body. The staging systems for non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC) and small cell lung cancer are different. NSCLC is described by a number, stages I through IV (one through four). Small cell lung cancer is classified as either limited stage or extensive stage. Illustrations for these stages are available at www.cancer.net/lung.

HOW IS LUNG CANCER TREATED?

Lung cancer is always treatable, no matter the size, location, or if the cancer has spread. The treatment options for lung cancer depend on the size and location of the tumor, whether the cancer has spread, and the person's overall health. There are four basic options to treat lung cancer: surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, and targeted therapy. The goal of surgery is the complete removal of the lung tumor with a surrounding border of normal tissue (called the margin) and nearby lymph nodes. NSCLC is often treated with a combination of these approaches. 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.

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, becoming organized, and considering a second opinion are other steps. Take care of yourself during this time. 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 associated with smoking, patients may feel that they will not receive as much support or help from people around them. However, most people who get lung cancer today either have stopped smoking years earlier, or have never smoked. A lung cancer diagnosis is serious, but 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 doctors:

- 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?
- Has cancer spread to my lymph nodes or anywhere else?
- Would you explain my treatment options?
- What clinical trials are open to me?
- How will this treatment benefit me?
- How will this treatment affect my daily life? Will I be able to work, exercise, and perform my usual activities?
- Will this treatment affect my ability to become pregnant or have children?
- What is the expected timeline for my treatment plan?
- What long-term side effects may be associated with my cancer treatment?
- Besides treating my cancer, what can be done to treat my symptoms?
- Where can I find emotional support for me and my family?
- Whom do 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.

Information in ASCO's patient education materials is not intended as medical advice or as a substitute for the treating doctor's own professional judgment; nor does it imply ASCO endorsement of any product, service, or company.

ASCO believes that all treatment decisions should be made between patients and their doctors.

**For more information, visit ASCO's patient website,
www.cancer.net, or call 888-651-3038.**

Cancer_oNet™

Making a world of difference in cancer care

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 the cancer began to another part of the body

Oncologist:

A doctor who specializes in treating people with cancer

Prognosis:

Chance of recovery

Radiation therapy:

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

Thoracotomy:

Removal of a lung tumor through an incision in the chest

Tumor:

A mass of tissue that requires a biopsy