

[Lung Cancer - Non-Small Cell - Introduction](#) [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 06/2016

ON THIS PAGE: You will find some basic information about this disease and the parts of the body it may affect. This is the first page of Cancer.Net's Guide to Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer. To see other pages, use the menu. Think of that menu as a roadmap to this full guide.

Lung cancer affects more than 200,000 Americans each year. Although cigarette smoking is the main cause, anyone can develop lung cancer. Lung cancer is always treatable, no matter the size, location, whether the cancer has spread, and how far it has spread.

Because lung cancer is associated with smoking, patients may feel that they will not receive as much support or help from people around them because they believe that others will think that their behavior caused the disease. The truth is that most smokers do not develop lung cancer, and not all people diagnosed with lung cancer smoke. Lung cancer is a disease that can affect anyone. In fact, most people who get lung cancer today have either stopped smoking years earlier or never smoked.

About the lungs

When a person inhales, the lungs absorb oxygen from the air and bring the oxygen into the bloodstream for delivery to the rest of the body. As the body's cells use oxygen, they release carbon dioxide. The bloodstream carries carbon dioxide back to the lungs, and the carbon dioxide leaves the body when a person exhales. The lungs contain many different types of cells. Most cells in the lung are epithelial cells. Epithelial cells line the airways and make mucus, which lubricates and protects the lung. The lung also contains nerve cells, hormone-producing cells, blood cells, and structural or supporting cells.

About non-small cell lung cancer

There are 2 main classifications of lung cancer: small cell lung cancer and non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC). These 2 types are treated differently. This guide contains information about NSCLC. Learn more about [small cell lung cancer](#) [3].

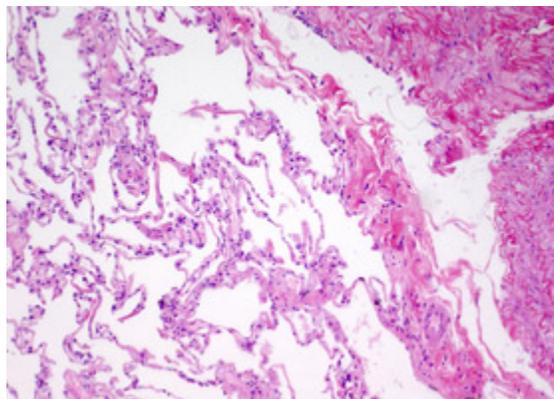
NSCLC begins when healthy cells in the lung change and grow out of control, forming a mass called a tumor, a lesion, or a nodule. A lung tumor can begin anywhere in the lung. A tumor can be cancerous or benign. Once a cancerous lung tumor grows, it may or may not shed cancer cells. These cells can be carried away in blood or float away in the fluid, called lymph, that surrounds lung tissue. Lymph flows through tubes called lymphatic vessels that drain into collecting stations called lymph nodes, the tiny, bean-shaped organs that help fight infection. Lymph nodes are located in the lungs, the center of the chest, and elsewhere in the body. The natural flow of lymph out of the lungs is toward the center of the chest, which explains why lung cancer often spreads there first. When a cancer cell moves into a lymph node or to a distant part of the body through the bloodstream, it is called metastasis.

Types of NSCLC

NSCLC begins in the epithelial cells. NSCLC may also be described based on the type of epithelial cell where the cancer starts:

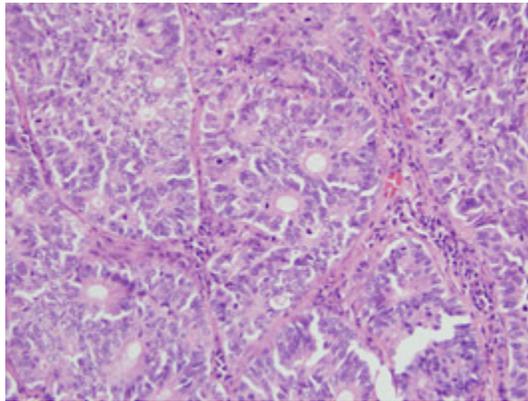
- Adenocarcinoma starts in cells that produce mucus.
- Squamous carcinoma begins in the cells that line the airways.
- Large cell carcinoma begins in cells other than the 2 types described above.

It is important for doctors to distinguish between lung cancer that begins in the squamous cells from lung cancer that begins in other cells. This information is used to determine treatment options.



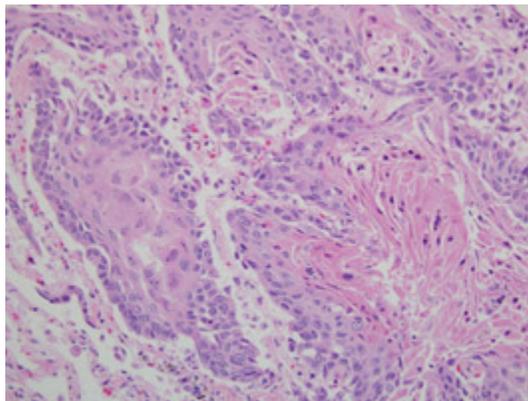
Normal lung tissue

[Click to Enlarge](#)



Lung - adenocarcinoma

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Lung - squamous cell carcinoma

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Looking for More of an Introduction?

If you would like more of an introduction, explore these related items. Please note these links will take you to other sections on Cancer.Net:

- **ASCO Answers Fact Sheet:** [Read a 1-page fact sheet](#) [4] that offers an introduction to this type of cancer. This fact sheet is available as a PDF, so it is easy to print out.
- **ASCO Answers Guide:** [Get this free 44-page booklet](#) [5] that helps you better understand this disease and treatment options, as well as keep track of the specifics. The

booklet is available as a PDF, so it is easy to print out.

- **Cancer.Net En Español:** [Read about this type of cancer in Spanish](#) [6]. [Infórmase sobre este tipo de cáncer en español](#) [6].

The [next section in this guide is Statistics](#) [7]. It helps explain how many people are diagnosed with this disease and general survival rates. Or, use the menu to choose another section to continue reading this guide.

Links

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/lung-cancer-non-small-cell/introduction>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/33776>

[4] http://www.cancer.net/patient/ASCO%20Resources/ASCO%20Answers/ASCO_Answers_Lung.pdf

[5] http://www.cancer.net/sites/cancer.net/files/asco_answers_guide_nsclc.pdf

[6] <http://www.cancer.net/es/node/31359>

[7] <http://www.cancer.net/node/19149>