

Mesothelioma - Risk Factors [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 06/2015

ON THIS PAGE: You will find out more about the factors that increase the chance of developing this type of cancer. To see other pages, use the menu on the side of your screen.

A risk factor is anything that increases a person's chance of developing cancer. Although risk factors often influence the development of cancer, most do not directly cause cancer. Some people with several risk factors never develop cancer, while others with no known risk factors do. However, knowing your risk factors and talking about them with your doctor may help you make more informed lifestyle and health care choices.

The following factors can raise a person's risk of developing mesothelioma:

- **Asbestos exposure.** Between 70% to 80% of people diagnosed with mesothelioma have been exposed to asbestos. Asbestos is a group of natural minerals found in the earth. Because of its strong, flexible fibers, asbestos was once commonly added to cement, insulation, roof shingles, and other products. People involved in making products containing asbestos or installing or maintaining these products can breathe in or swallow the asbestos fibers. These fibers can also be carried in asbestos dust on clothing or personal items, exposing family members of the workers to potentially high levels of the minerals. Current safety regulations require people who work with asbestos to wear protective equipment and to shower and change clothes before leaving the workplace.
- **Smoking** [3]. By itself, smoking does not increase the risk of mesothelioma, but the combination of smoking and asbestos exposure highly increases the risk of certain types of cancer in the lungs.

- **Radiation exposure.** Radiation exposure may cause mesothelioma, such as when a patient has previously received radiation therapy for lymphoma.
- **Zeolite exposure.** Exposure to a type of mineral called zeolite may cause mesothelioma.
- **Genetics.** About 1% of people with mesothelioma have inherited mesothelioma, meaning the risk of developing the disease was passed from parent to child within a family. Usually, it is due to a mutation or change in a gene called *BAP1*.

Even though some people with mesothelioma have no known risk factors, many people who develop mesothelioma have been exposed to asbestos. Therefore, it is important to always wear protective gear and follow safety precautions when working with asbestos.

The [next section in this guide is Symptoms and Signs](#) [4] and it explains what body changes or medical problems this disease can cause. Or, use the menu on the side of your screen to choose another section to continue reading this guide.

Links

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/mesothelioma/risk-factors>

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

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25002>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/19283>