

LUNG CANCER

101

Normal lung

Cancerous tumour

WHAT IS LUNG CANCER?

It is believed that lung cancer begins developing when changes occur in the DNA of the lung cells, causing the cells to rapidly grow. While they may look abnormal, at this point they do not cause cancer symptoms such as tumor growth. If the abnormal cells experience further gene changes, however, they can progress to cancer. Once cancer is developed inside the lungs, the formation of new blood cells occurs, which then feeds the cancer cells, allowing them to form tumors or masses. The cancer is able to spread throughout the body when cells from the cancerous tumor break off. This is a key factor in making lung cancer such a deadly disease, because the cancer often spreads even before detection by x-ray is possible.¹

TYPES OF LUNG CANCER

There are two main types of lung cancer—small cell and non-small cell lung cancer, which are named after how their cells appear under a microscope. It is possible to have a combination of both types of cancer known as a combined small cell/non-small cell cancer, however, this does not occur very often.¹

CHARACTERISTICS OF NON-SMALL CELL LUNG CANCER:

- Non-small cell lung cancers are the most common type of lung cancers.
- The three main types of non-small cell lung cancer are squamous cell carcinoma, adenocarcinoma, large cell carcinoma¹

CHARACTERISTICS OF SMALL CELL LUNG CANCER

- Small cell lung cancers make up only 10-15% of lung cancers.
- It is highly uncommon for a non-smoker to be diagnosed with small cell lung cancer.¹

There are two major types of lung cancer:

- Small cell lung cancer
- Non-small cell lung cancer¹

Approximately 85%-90% of lung cancers are non-small cell lung cancers.¹

FACTS ABOUT LUNG CANCER

- Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in both men and women, accounting for 27% of all cancer deaths.
- Lung cancer mainly occurs in people aged 65 and over. The average age of diagnosis is 70.
- The odds of surviving lung cancer, like many other types of cancer, vary depending on the stage at which the cancer is diagnosed.¹

SMOKING AND LUNG CANCER

Smoking increases the risk of developing non-small cell lung cancer. Smoking includes cigarettes, pipes or cigars. The longer a person smokes directly correlates with their odds of developing lung cancer, but if a smoker stops, the risk lowers with every passing year. Being exposed to secondhand smoke also increases a person's risk. Combining the risk factor of smoking with other risk factors, such as having a family history of lung cancer, greatly increases the chances of developing lung cancer.²

If a cancer spreads to the lungs from other organs, such as breast, kidney, or skin, it is still not considered lung cancer.¹

OTHER CAUSES OF LUNG CANCER

While smoking is a common cause of lung cancer, it is not the only way to develop it. Other risk factors include treatment of radiation therapy, exposure to asbestos, air pollution, contracting HIV, and exposure to radon.²

Radon, a deadly, naturally occurring radioactive gas, is the number one cause of lung cancer in non-smokers. Exposure to radon by smokers increases the odds they will develop lung cancer. While radon can be found in households worldwide, radon-caused lung cancer is preventable through testing and mitigation.³



SYMPTOMS OF LUNG CANCER

- Cough that doesn't go away
- Shortness of breath
- Pain or discomfort in chest
- Hoarseness
- Loss of appetite/weight loss
- Excessive tiredness
- Trouble swallowing
- Swelling of the face/neck²

Did you know?

Lung cancer is the second most common cancer in both men and women.¹

TREATMENT OF LUNG CANCER

For lung cancer, there are different types of treatment options available that include surgery, radiation therapy and chemotherapy. The type of treatment used typically depends on factors such as the stage of the cancer when detected and if it has spread to other parts of the body, the type of lung cancer, whether the cancer has mutations and the patient's general health.²

Ways to Help Prevent Lung Cancer

The following help reduce the risk of contracting lung cancer:

- Not smoking
- Quitting smoking
- Limiting exposure to asbestos and air pollution
- Limiting exposure to radon²

Sources:

1 Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer, American Cancer Society, Retrieved Oct 30, 2014, <http://www.cancer.org/cancer/lungcancer-non-smallcell?gclid=CJqX17y71cECFe5cfgodnAYAyQ>

2 Lung Cancer, National Cancer Institute, Retrieved Oct 30, 2014, <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/types/lung>

3 Radon No. 1 Lung Cancer Cause in Nonsmokers, Reno Gazette Journal, Published Oct 24, 2014, <http://www.rgj.com/story/life/wellness/2014/10/24/radon-lung-cancer-cause-nonsmokers/17866569/>

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