

NOVEMBER 2013 • MEMBERS

## Lung Cancer

### November Is Lung Cancer Awareness Month

So now is a good time to learn about this disease. It will help you take control of your health.

Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths. It causes about 27% of them.<sup>1</sup> In 2013, about 159,000 people will die from lung cancer.<sup>1</sup> On average they'll be about 72 years old.<sup>2</sup> Most of them will have the type called non-small cell lung cancer.<sup>2</sup>

Only about 17% of people with lung cancer survive 5 years after diagnosis.<sup>1</sup> As *with other cancers, prevention and early detection are key.*

### Signs and Symptoms

Some symptoms of lung cancer are coughing, chest pain, and trouble breathing. Others may include:

- Wheezing
- Coughing up blood
- Hoarseness
- Trouble swallowing
- Loss of appetite
- Sudden weight loss
- Feeling tired
- Swelling in the face or veins in the neck

### Risk Factors

The number one risk factor is smoking. Smoking tobacco may cause as many as 90% of all lung cancers.<sup>3</sup> The risk increases the longer a person smokes and the more a person smokes.<sup>1,4,5</sup> The good news is that if a person stops smoking, the risk will go down. But it will never be as low as it would have been if the person never smoked.<sup>5</sup>

Some other risk factors are:

- Secondhand smoke (tobacco smoke breathed in by a nonsmoker)
- Exposure to asbestos or other toxins in the environment
- Exposure to radiation, like the kind used to treat other cancers
- Family history of lung cancer
- Having had tuberculosis or certain other lung diseases



### Things You Can Do to Prevent Lung Cancer

- Understand your risks.
- Talk with your doctor about how to lower your risks.
- Know the symptoms of lung cancer.
- Tell your doctor about any symptoms you may have.
- Find out if you should be screened for lung cancer.

## Take Control of Your Health

Here are some things you can do to lower your risk of lung cancer:

- Join a stop-smoking program (if you smoke).
- Talk with your doctor about quitting. There are things to help you stop smoking. These include nicotine replacements, support groups, and medicines.
- Talk with your doctor about risks in your surroundings. That way you can limit or avoid them.
- Talk with your doctor about your family history of lung cancer.

## Screening and Early Detection

Finding lung cancer early can increase chances of survival. Experts recommend that people at high risk get screened. They recommend a CT scan once a year. Talk to your doctor to learn more about your risk and see if you would benefit from screening.

## Diagnosis and Treatment

Lung cancer diagnosis may involve several tests. A CT scan, chest x-ray, and/or biopsy may be needed.

Treatment depends on the stage of the disease and other factors. Options include:

- Surgery to remove the tumor
- Radiation to kill the tumor cells
- Chemotherapy to kill the tumor cells or limit their growth
- Targeted therapies that attack the things that help cancer cells grow

Side effects of targeted therapies are often less than those of other drugs. But they are not for all patients. Doctors use laboratory tests to find out if targeted drugs might work for a patient. The tests look for mutations (changes) in certain genes. These genes include *EGFR*, *KRAS*, *ALK*, and *ROS1*.

## References

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3. Alberg AJ, Samet JM. Epidemiology of lung cancer. *Chest*. 2003;123(1 suppl):21S-49S.
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Lung Cancer Risk Factors. [http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/lung/basic\\_info/risk\\_factors.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/lung/basic_info/risk_factors.htm). Accessed October 11, 2013.
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