



# Learn More About Lung Cancer Screening

## | Lung Cancer

Lung cancer is a disease that occurs when cells in the lungs begin to grow out of control. The majority of lung cancers are seen in people over the age of 50. But in the last few years, we are seeing more people being diagnosed with lung cancer before the age of 50 and without a significant history of smoking.<sup>1</sup>

**Knowing the signs and symptoms of lung cancer and how your environmental exposures impact risk can help to guide your lung cancer screening plan.**

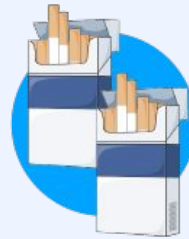


# When should I start getting screened for lung cancer?

The American Cancer Society recommends that people who have a long history of smoking get screened for lung cancer. A long history is 20-pack years. One pack-year is defined as the equivalent of smoking one pack of cigarettes a day for one year. So, twenty pack-years may look like smoking 2 packs per day for 10 years, or it could look like smoking 1 pack per day for 20 years.



x 20 years  
=  
20 pack year history



x 10 years  
=  
20 pack year history

For people who meet criteria, the American Cancer Society recommends that you consider an annual low-dose lung CT scan starting at age 50.

This is the standard recommendation in the general population. However, if you are at increased risk for lung cancer or are having symptoms of lung cancer, talk with your healthcare provider about whether or not it is appropriate for you to be screened earlier.



## How can I get screened for lung cancer?

### Low-dose lung CT

A low-dose lung CT uses x-rays to take pictures of the lungs and is the most effective screening tool used to detect lung cancer. During a CT scan, you will lie down on a table. The table will move through the center of the CT scan machine, which is shaped like a large doughnut. For start to finish, a low-dose lung CT scan typically takes about 10-30 minutes. This screening test is generally not recommended before age 50.

# What are the symptoms of lung cancer I should look out for?

Most people do not have symptoms of lung cancer until it's at a more advanced stage. When symptoms do appear, the most common are:

- A cough that does not go away or gets worse
- Coughing up blood or rust-colored sputum (spit or phlegm)
- Chest pain that is often worse with deep breathing, coughing, or laughing
- Hoarseness
- Loss of appetite
- Unexplained weight loss
- Shortness of breath
- Feeling tired or weak
- Infections such as bronchitis and pneumonia that don't go away or keep coming back
- New onset of wheezing

**It's important to remember that most of the time these symptoms are not caused by lung cancer.** But if you're noticing more than one symptom, or if the symptoms don't go away, or if they come back, it's important to talk with a healthcare provider.

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## How can I get ahead of my risk for lung cancer?

Even if you're under the age of 50 and do not smoke, or do not have a 20-pack-year smoking history, you may still be at risk for lung cancer. While there is no way to completely eliminate your risk for lung cancer, there are things you can do to help lower your risk.

### Avoid tobacco

If you do smoke, the best thing you can do for your risk is to quit. The American Cancer Society reports that quitting smoking before the age of 40 reduces the risk of dying from a smoking-related disease by about 90%.<sup>2</sup> Avoiding second hand smoke when possible is another way to reduce your risk.

### Avoid environmental exposures

There are many factors in our environment that can increase the risk for lung cancer – for example, exposure to radon, asbestos, radioactive materials, and radiation can all increase your risk. While it may be difficult to completely eliminate some of these exposures in your environment, reducing the duration or amount of exposure can make a difference.

1 Pelosof L, Ahn C, Gao A, et al. Proportion of Never-Smoker Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer Patients at Three Diverse Institutions. J Natl Cancer Inst. 2017;109(7). doi:10.1093/jnci/djw295  
2 Health Benefits of Quitting Smoking Over Time. Accessed August 28, 2023. <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/tobacco/benefits-of-quitteing-smoking-over-time.html>



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