

Lung Cancer

Lung cancer is a disease which develops in tissues of the lung, usually in the cells lining air passages. Lung cancer is responsible for the most cancer-related deaths in both men and women. The most common type of lung cancer, non-small cell lung cancer, accounts for approximately 85 to 90 percent of lung cancers. Although lung cancer can be treated and in some cases prevented, the survival rate for this type of cancer is one of the lowest. Approximately 11 to 15 percent of people live more than five years beyond their initial diagnosis.

Statistics

- Smoking is the leading cause of lung cancer.
- In 2008, lung cancer will cause an estimated 161,840 deaths in the United States. This represents about 29 percent of all cancer-related deaths.
- In 2008, 215,020 men and women in the United States will be diagnosed with lung cancer.
- Approximately 85 percent of people diagnosed with lung cancer will die within five years of their initial diagnosis.
- Lung cancer is often perceived as a man's disease but, in fact, since 1987, more American women have died of lung cancer than breast cancer each year.
- In Texas, approximately 24,000 adults die of smoking-attributable illnesses, such as lung cancer, annually.

Risk Factors

- **Age:** Most people are older than 65 years when diagnosed with lung cancer.
- **Family and/or Personal History:** People with a parent or sibling who had lung cancer have a higher than average risk of developing the disease, even if they are non-smokers. Also, lung cancer patients are at increased risk of developing a second lung tumor.
- **Smoking:** Tobacco smoke is the most important risk factor for lung cancer, as it is the cause of most lung cancer cases. Second-hand smoke can cause lung cancer in non-smokers. The more a person is exposed to smoke, the greater their risk of developing lung cancer.
- **Exposure:** People who live or work in certain conditions (e.g., construction workers, miners) where they are exposed to radioactive gas, asbestos, arsenic, soot, tar, radon, and other substances have an increased risk of lung cancer.

Symptoms

Lung cancer symptoms vary from patient to patient. If the following symptoms are present, individuals are encouraged to consult their physician:

- Constant chest pain
- Coughing up blood or a cough that won't go away
- Breathing trouble, such as shortness of breath
- Shoulder pain with numbness in some fingers
- Frequent lung infections, such as pneumonia
- Weight loss with no known cause

Prevention

- Do not smoke. Smoking is the number one risk factor for lung cancer. Tobacco smoke causes about nine out of 10 cases of lung cancer.
- Avoid second-hand smoke. Approximately 3,400 adult non-smokers die in the United States each year from lung cancer as a result of exposure to second-hand smoke.
- Take precautions at work. Some workplaces expose people to fumes, dust, and chemicals that can cause lung cancer.
- Have your home tested for radon. Radon is a radioactive gas that cannot be seen, felt, smelled, or tasted. Homes built over natural deposits of uranium, which occur in the soil, can create high levels of indoor radon exposure which can lead to lung cancer.

Treatment Options

Lung cancer, depending on the stage, may be treated by different members of the cancer care team – pulmonologists, thoracic surgeons, medical oncologists, and radiation oncologists. Consultation with each of these specialists is encouraged where appropriate. The chance of recovery and treatment options vary widely depending on the stage and type of the cancer, the patient's symptoms and overall health, and a variety of other factors. Unfortunately, most current treatments are unable to completely cure lung cancer, however, there are many clinical trials that may be available for patients with lung cancer.

Sources: American Cancer Society, National Cancer Institute, Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and Texas Department of State Health Services