

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Understanding and Treating Lung Cancer

Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in both men and women. Although smoking is the major culprit, non-smokers can also develop the disease. According to the American Cancer Association, smoking is responsible for 85% of lung cancers. Therefore, statistically, lung cancer caused by smoking is responsible for nearly 135,000 U.S. deaths per year.

Risk Factors

The main cause of lung cancer is smoking. Most people who develop lung cancer are long-term heavy smokers. The more you smoke and the longer you smoke, the higher your risk. But no amount of tobacco is safe. People who live with or work closely with a smoker are also at increased risk because of their exposure to second-hand smoke.

Other factors that appear to increase the risk of lung cancer are:

- Working with materials such as asbestos, arsenic, nickel and petroleum products, especially if you are a smoker
- Exposure to radon gas

Signs and Symptoms of Lung Cancer

If you are concerned that you have lung cancer, see your doctor immediately. Some of the signs and symptoms of the disease include:

- A cough, or a change in an existing cough
- Coughing up blood (hemoptysis)
- Constant tiredness
- General discomfort
- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Pain in the chest
- Shortness of breath
- Hoarseness
- Trouble swallowing
- Pneumonia

Diagnosis

Diagnostic tools may include any or all of the following:

- Sputum collection and analysis
- Bronchoscopy, which involves examination of the lungs through a thin, flexible telescope that is passed through the mouth or the nose
- If a tumor is found, a small sample may be removed by the bronchoscope for analysis
- Mediastinoscopy, which removes a tiny sample of tissue via a fine needle that is inserted into the chest

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- CT scan of the lungs, which can both detect cancer and indicate its seriousness
- MRI, which provides detailed images of suspect areas
- Surgical biopsy is occasionally required

Treatment Options

Depending on the type of cancer and the stage of the disease, one or a combination of several treatment options may be used, including:

- Surgery to remove the cancerous area or the entire lung
- Radiation therapy to damage or destroy cancer cells (this may also be used before surgery to shrink a tumor)
- Chemotherapy may be used to control cancer growth or to relieve symptoms
- Photodynamic therapy involves damaging or removing cancer cells with a laser light

If you suspect that you or a loved one may have lung cancer, make a doctor’s appointment today. It could save your life.