

Breathing easier

A guide to the treatment
and care of lung cancer



NO TIME TO DRAW BREATH? WHAT EVERY SMOKER SHOULD KNOW

Macmillan Cancer Relief has produced this leaflet – in consultation with leading lung cancer specialists and people with lung cancer – to help you if you are worried that you may have lung cancer, or if you have recently been diagnosed with lung cancer.

It aims to show the symptoms of lung cancer; if lung cancer is diagnosed; and other help and support that is available. There is lot of expert help available within the NHS and this leaflet is to assist you and your family to get the support you need.

What to look out for

If you have any of the following symptoms, don't ignore any worries you have; talk to your doctor:

- A chest infection that doesn't get better
- Coughing up blood
- A cough that is changing or has been troubling you more
- Feeling more breathless than usual
- Chest pain
- Voice changes that last for more than tree weeks, for example hoarseness
- Problems with swallowing
- Feeling generally unwell and tired

Seeing your doctor: what to expect

To find out what is causing your symptoms your doctor will:

- Examine you
- Arrange for you to have a chest X-ray, if necessary, within one week
- Talk through the results of the X-ray with you, within two weeks
- In further tests are needed, make an appointment for you to see a chest specialist within another two weeks

Some patients with lung cancer may have symptoms other than those listed above, and be seen by a different specialist. This specialist would then refer them to the lung cancer team, if necessary. What we describe here is what happens in the majority of cases.

Diagnosis: the different stages

- Initial investigations will be carried out within two weeks of seeing the chest specialist.
- To make an accurate diagnosis, it will be necessary for a number of different tests to be done. These may include a bronchoscopy – an examination of the inside of the lung with a tube – scans and breathing tests.
- The results of tests should be talked through with you by the chest specialist.
- If lung cancer is diagnosed, a treatment plan will be discussed and agreed with you. This will generally be within six weeks of having first gone to your doctor.
- From the time of diagnosis, you should have access to a specialist cancer nurse who can answer any questions you have and give you and your family support if you need it.

Treatment and care for lung cancer

All patients with lung cancer can be helped and some can be cured. Many treatments exist for lung cancer and not all patients will need the same treatment.

- Whatever treatment is discussed with you it is important that you and your relatives and friends have the information you need and time to think about what is being discussed with you.
- You should have the opportunity to ask the doctors and nurses involved in your care any questions.
- Don't feel afraid to ask questions about other possible treatments available; your doctor and nurse will be happy to discuss all these things with you openly so that you can become involved in treatment decisions yourself, if you wish.
- New treatments are being developed all the time and these are sometimes tested in clinical trials. You may be invited to be involved in a clinical trial but this is entirely voluntary, so feel free to ask questions about it.

Some of the treatments that may be discussed with you are listed below. Sometimes more than one kind of treatment is needed, for example chemotherapy and radiotherapy, or surgery and chemotherapy and radiotherapy. Each person is different, and the treatment has to be tailored on an individual basis. In some cases you may have to travel to a specialist hospital for part of your treatment.

Surgery

In a small proportion of patients it may be possible to remove the lung cancer by an operation on the chest.

Radiotherapy

This is a kind of X-ray treatment, given in a cancer centre, and it is the most commonly-used treatment for lung cancer. The number of treatments depends on your individual case, and your radiotherapist will discuss this with you.

Chemotherapy

This is drug treatment, given either by injection or pills. There are many different types of chemotherapy treatment. They vary in strength and in how long they last, depending on the type of lung cancer that is being treated.

Questions you may wish to ask your doctor

- What are the aims of the treatment?
- What are the benefits of the different options for treatment?
- What are the side effects of the treatment?
- How long will the treatment take?
- How will it affect my everyday life?

Diet, rest and help with breathing

Whatever treatment you are having, a good diet and a good balance of rest and activity are important ways of improving how you feel. So do ask for advice on diet, and on what you can do to help with breathing.

Follow-up care

When you return home after having your treatment the hospital team and your GP and the community team will work together to give you any help and support you may need.

About Macmillan Cancer Relief

Macmillan Cancer Relief is a national charity dedicated to working towards the day when everyone will have equal and ready access to the best information, treatment and care for cancer. We fund Macmillan nurses, Macmillan doctors, the building of cancer care units, and provide grants for people with cancer in financial need.

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