

# LUNG CANCER: ATTITUDES, LOWERING RISK AND SCREENING

Lung cancer is the second most common type of cancer in the United States after skin cancers. Lung cancer happens when some of the cells in the lungs change and start to grow out of control. This can form a tumor or mass. Regular lung cancer screening can help find these tumors early when they are easier to treat. This is especially true if you are at higher risk than average for getting this disease.



## Attitudes About Lung Cancer

There is sometimes shame around lung cancer. Because lung cancer has been linked to smoking, people sometimes believe it is the smoker's fault for getting it. This is simply not true. No one deserves to get lung cancer or to die from lung cancer.

This attitude of blaming the victim may cause unfair treatment from society and even cause people to avoid screening for lung cancer. It can cause people with lung cancer to feel depressed, angry and guilty.

In reality, even people that have never smoked may be at risk of lung cancer. Second hand smoke and being exposed to certain chemicals and toxins such as radon, air pollution and asbestos can also cause lung cancer.

Learning about lung cancer and how to detect it early can help you feel more comfortable moving forward in taking care of yourself. It is better to think about your own health and not be afraid to do the things that can help you become or stay healthy.



## How to Lower Your Risk

- **Quit smoking.** If you smoke, quitting is the best way to reduce your risk of lung cancer. Quitting is hard, but there are ways to help you. Talk to your doctor about programs to stop smoking, also called smoking cessation or tobacco treatment programs.
- **Stay away from second hand smoking.** Avoid spending time around others who are smoking.
- **Protect yourself at home and work.** The Environmental Protection Agency recommends that you get your home tested for radon. If you work with or around hazardous chemicals, ask about what you can do to avoid greater risk.



## Understanding Screening Guidelines

**For those at high risk for lung cancer from a history of smoking:** A screening by low-dose computed tomography (LDCT) every year is recommended for smokers and former smokers who are at high risk. This includes people from age 50 to 80 who have a 20 pack-year or more smoking history and currently smoke. If you quit within the past 15 years, you should also be screened.

A “pack-year” is a term doctors often use. A pack-year is counted as the same as smoking a pack of cigarettes per day for a year. If you have smoked a pack a day for the last 20 years, this equals 20 pack-years. If you smoke two packs a day for 10 years, this is also the same as 20 pack-years, because it is the same number of cigarettes. If you have 20 pack-years or more, screening is usually recommended. Your doctor can help you calculate this number for you.

### CALCULATING A “PACK-YEAR”

$$\begin{array}{rcccl} 1 & \times & 20 & = & 20 \\ \text{PACK} & & \text{YEARS} & & \text{PACK-} \\ \text{A DAY} & & & & \text{YEARS} \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{rcccl} 2 & \times & 10 & = & 20 \\ \text{PACKS} & & \text{YEARS} & & \text{PACK-} \\ \text{A DAY} & & & & \text{YEARS} \end{array}$$

**For those at higher risk due to family history or exposure to chemicals or pollution:** Ask your doctor about your own risk and whether you may need to be screened.

**For all others:** Even if you have never smoked, you may still wish to talk to your doctor about lung cancer screening. Your doctor can help you decide if and when screening is right for you.

For more information about lung cancer and screening, contact your health care professional.

For more information, visit [cancer.org/lunghealth](https://cancer.org/lunghealth)

*This program is supported by Bristol Myers Squibb.*