

# AFTER A LUNG CANCER DIAGNOSIS: QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR DOCTOR

A diagnosis of lung cancer can leave you and your loved ones feeling uncertain, anxious and overwhelmed. As your health care team talks about your diagnosis and treatment, ask questions about anything you don't understand. Good communication with your doctor will help improve the quality of the care you receive. Before your appointments, it's a good idea to bring a list of questions to the appointment and write down the doctor's responses. Many individuals find it helpful to bring a copy of their list of questions for their doctors to use during the appointment discussion. In addition, if possible, bring someone with you to any appointment; another set of ears can help reduce confusion.

## HERE IS A LIST OF QUESTIONS THAT YOU MAY WANT TO ASK YOUR HEALTH CARE TEAM

**Since I've been diagnosed, I've been overwhelmed. How can I better cope with my diagnosis?** A cancer diagnosis turns a person's world upside down emotionally and physically. Your team of doctors, nurses and social workers may be valuable sources of support as you cope with a cancer diagnosis. Oncology social workers are licensed professionals who counsel people affected by cancer, providing emotional support and helping people access practical assistance. CancerCare's oncology social workers provide individual counseling, support groups and locate services face-to-face, online or on the telephone, free of charge. To learn more, visit [www.cancerca.org](http://www.cancerca.org) or call 800-813-HOPE (4673).



## What type of lung cancer do I have?

Lung cancer occurs when the cells in the lung begin to change and grow uncontrollably, forming a tumor (also called a lesion or a nodule), which can be either cancerous or benign. The two main types of lung cancer are small cell lung cancer (SCLC) and non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC). Subtypes of non-small cell lung cancer are broken down into three further types based on the kind of cells that the cancer originated in. These are called: adenocarcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma and large cell carcinoma. The type of lung cancer that you have is an important factor in determining which treatments may work best for you.

**What stage is my tumor?** A tumor's stage refers to its size and extent of spread in the body—that is, whether it has spread to lymph nodes or other organs. Cancer that has spread to other organs is called metastatic cancer. A cancer's stage is often denoted by a Roman numeral (I, II, III or IV). The higher the numeral, the more the cancer has spread to lymph nodes or other organs within the body.

**What is my recommended treatment plan?** Chemotherapy and radiation are the main treatment options for people with small cell lung cancer. Surgery is rarely used

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for patients with small cell lung cancer and is only considered for individuals with very early-stage lung cancer. Treatment options for non-small cell lung cancer may include surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, targeted therapies and immunotherapy.

### **What is dyspnea and can this affect me?**

The shortness of breath, or dyspnea, can be uncomfortable and frightening. The more you struggle for air, the harder your lungs work to get oxygen, and the more distressed you feel. Talk to your health care team if you have experienced dyspnea or about how you can possibly prevent dyspnea. If you're experiencing dyspnea, prepare for your doctor's appointment by keeping a record of your breathing problems. It may be helpful to keep these questions in mind:

- When do you experience shortness of breath?
- When does it feel worst?
- How long does each episode last?
- What is going on around you before, during, and after each episode?
- Does anything make it feel better?

### **I do not smoke. How can I have lung cancer?**

A lung cancer diagnosis may lead some people to ask, "Did you smoke?" Many people with lung cancer have never smoked or stopped smoking many years before they were diagnosed with lung cancer, and it's natural to find such a personal question offensive. Your health care team can help you find ways to talk about lung cancer and its association with smoking cigarettes.

### **What is cachexia? Could this affect me?**

Cachexia (pronounced kə'-kek-sēə) is unwanted and uncontrolled weight and lean muscle loss. By changing how the body breaks down food, cachexia can also change the taste and smell of food. Individuals with advanced lung cancer may experience cachexia. If you think you're losing weight, talk to your health care team immediately as a routine of moderate exercise and nutrition may help to reduce the impact of this condition.

### **What side effects might I experience**

**throughout my treatment plan?** Keep in mind that side effects can vary from person to person, and can be treated by your health care team. A key to managing side effects is to be aware of them and communicate with your health care team when they arise. Report them right away—don't wait for your next appointment. Your health care team can help you cope with side effects of lung cancer treatment.

**Should I seek a second opinion?** Usually with a new diagnosis there is a period of time, depending on the cancer type and stage, before treatment begins. During this time, getting a second opinion may help give you a peace of mind or an alternative treatment possibility. Talk to your health care team and read CancerCare's "When to Get a Second Opinion" fact sheet for more information.

**Is there a clinical trial I can participate in? If so, will it be covered by my insurance?** Clinical trials are the standard by which we measure the worth of new treatments and the quality of life of patients as they receive those treatments. For this reason, doctors and researchers urge people with cancer to take part in clinical trials. Read CancerCare's "Clinical Trials: What You Need to Know" fact sheet to learn more information on clinical trials.

### **CancerCare® Can Help**

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by professional oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

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