

Lung cancer



You've just learned that you have lung cancer. Of course you're feeling worried and anxious – it's entirely normal to feel that way. Here is some information to help you understand the disease.

What is lung cancer?

Cancer occurs when cells multiply uncontrollably. This forms a mass we call a "tumour." As it develops, the tumour may affect the proper function of the lungs.

Cancer cells may break away from the tumour and circulate in the blood or lymphatic system. They travel to other organs, where they may create new tumours. This is what we call "metastases."

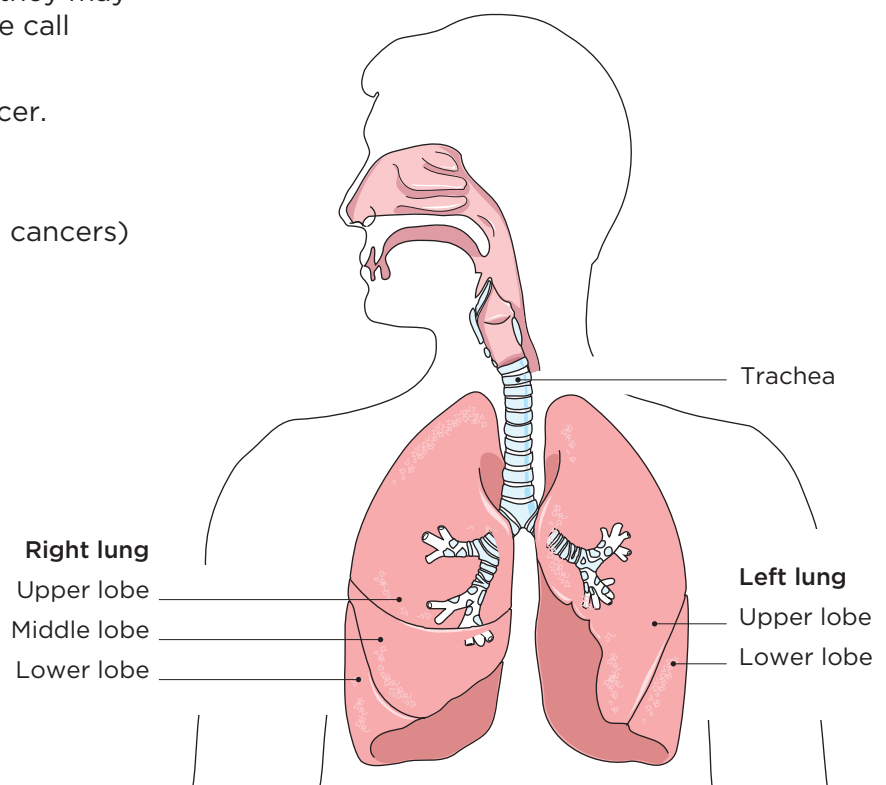
There are several types of lung cancer. The most common forms are:

- adenocarcinoma (the most common - 55% of lung cancers)
- squamous cell carcinoma (30% of lung cancers)
- small-cell carcinoma (15% of lung cancers)

Who is most affected by lung cancer?

Lung cancer is a common disease – the second most frequently diagnosed cancer in both men and women. It tops the list of new cases of cancers that come in every year.

The lungs



Is lung cancer easily treatable?

The chance of a cure depends on where the tumour is located, what stage it's at, and its composition. If it's not curable, certain treatments may be used to stabilize or reduce the effects of the disease.



What are the signs and symptoms of lung cancer?

Lung cancer is sometimes present without any apparent signs. It can also cause certain symptoms. However, other diseases can cause the same symptoms. That's why several tests are necessary to check whether it really is cancer. A doctor should evaluate the following symptoms, which could indicate the presence of cancer:

- persistent cough
- coughing up blood
- persistent fatigue
- loss of appetite or weight loss
- chest pain
- breathlessness and wheezing
- husky voice
- frequent or continuous lung infections (bronchitis or pneumonia)

What are the risk factors for lung cancer?

Here are the major factors that increase the risk of having lung cancer:

- smoking or exposure to second-hand smoke
- exposure to certain chemicals in the workplace
- exposure to radon gas
- having had lung disease or lung cancer in the past
- age
- vulnerability to this type of cancer through your parents (genetic predisposition)
- air pollution

In 15% to 20% of those who are affected, there is no way of knowing which factors have caused the disease.

What tests may I have?

If you have lung cancer, you will probably be prescribed some of the following tests. The goal is to gauge your overall state of health and determine the stage of your disease.

These tests may include:

- **an X-ray** that provides an image of the lungs
- **a scan (tomodensitometry) of the chest**, which provides 3D images of the lungs
- **a PET scan (positron emission tomography)**. In addition to providing 3D images, this measures the activity of organs and tumours
- **a blood test** to evaluate the quantity and quality of various elements present in the blood
- **respiratory function tests** that measure lung capacity

What are the stages in the development of lung cancer?

To choose the best treatment, your doctor needs to know what stage the cancer has reached. Doctors look at 3 factors to establish the stage. The system is called TNM, which stands for **Tumour-Node-Metastasis**.

T: size and location of the **tumour** in the lung

N: whether there are tumours in the lymph **nodes** (small organs that filter the lymphatic system)

M: whether there are **metastases**

Doctors classify cancers from 0 to 4 on the TNM scale, according to the stage they have reached.

Stage 0: Abnormal cells are touching the walls of the lungs or respiratory pathways (trachea, bronchial tubes or bronchioles), but they haven't formed a tumour.

Stages 1 and 2: The cancer is affecting only one lung and can generally be eradicated by local interventions (surgery, radiation therapy).

Stage 3: The cancer is more advanced, but could be curable with different treatments (surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy).

Stage 4: The cancer has metastasized to other organs and is only very rarely curable. The goal of treatment at this stage is generally "palliative," in other words to relieve symptoms and slow the progression of the disease.

For small-cell carcinoma, a simplified classification system is sometimes used. It has only 2 stages.

Limited stage: The tumour affects only one lung and the adjacent lymph nodes.

Extensive stage: The tumour has spread beyond the lungs.

What are the possible treatments?

There are various treatments. Some patients will receive 2 or more treatments at the same time.

The choice will depend on the characteristics of the cancer, how far advanced it is, your age and your general state of health. Your doctor will explain:

- the treatments you could have
- the advantages and disadvantages of each treatment

Surgery: This would involve the complete removal of 1 of your lungs or only 1 or 2 lobes. This does not generally apply to small-cell carcinomas.

Immunotherapy: Treatment that strengthens your immune system and helps it find and destroy cancer cells.

Chemotherapy: Treatment with medication that destroys cancer cells. The drugs are injected into your veins or taken orally.

Targeted therapy: Similar to chemo, but using medications that more specifically target cancer cells.

Radiation therapy: Treatment with high-energy X-rays directed at the tumour to shrink or completely destroy it.



Patient receiving radiation therapy.

Clinical trials or research protocols: These are ways of trying out new medications, treatments or new combinations of existing treatments.

Complementary therapies: Yoga, tai chi, meditation, visualization, etc. These practices may improve your sense of well-being and reduce your stress.



What symptoms should I watch out for?

If any of your symptoms gets worse, contact a member of your care team right away.

Who should I ask for help or answers to my questions?

Contact your pivot nurse or your research nurse. If she can't answer your questions, she'll send you to someone who can.

Feel free to ask your doctor anything you want to know when you go for an appointment. Write down your questions ahead of time so you won't forget anything.



USEFUL RESOURCES

Canadian Cancer Society
Cancer help line:
> **1 888 939-3333**
> **cancer.ca**

Quebec Cancer Foundation
Info cancer line:
> **1 800 363-0063**
> **fqc.qc.ca**

Other health sheets published by the CHUM are available. Ask for those that might fit your situation.



You can also find them on our web site
chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante



Questions

The content of this document in no way replaces the recommendations and diagnoses made, or the treatment suggested by your health professional.

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