

Lung Cancer

What you should know

Plain 
English
Approved by NALA

Irish 
Cancer
Society

What is lung cancer?

Lung cancer is when normal cells in your lung grow in an abnormal way to form a lump called a tumour.

How common is lung cancer?

Lung cancer is one of the most common cancers in Ireland. Around 2,600 people are diagnosed with it every year.

Some facts about lung cancer

- ▶ More people die from lung cancer than any other cancer.
- ▶ The sooner you stop smoking, the more you reduce your risk.
- ▶ Smoking causes nearly 9 out of 10 lung cancers.
- ▶ The average age when a person is diagnosed is about 70.
- ▶ Lung cancer usually affects people over the age of 40, although younger people can get lung cancer.

What increases my risk of lung cancer?

Risk factors are things that increase your chance of getting lung cancer. Sometimes people without any risk factors may get the disease. Some of those risk factors we can change, and some we cannot. If you have a risk factor, it doesn't mean you will get lung cancer.



Smoking

Smoking causes nearly 9 in every 10 lung cancers. The longer you have smoked, the greater the risk. Smoking cigarettes and breathing in other people's smoke also increases your risk.



Family history

Your risk of lung cancer is increased if an immediate family member has had lung cancer. An immediate family member is a:

- ▶ Parent
- ▶ Brother
- ▶ Sister
- ▶ Child



Chemicals

Being exposed to certain chemicals can increase your risk of lung cancer. These include:

- ▶ Asbestos
- ▶ Metal dust
- ▶ Paints
- ▶ Diesel exhaust



Radon gas

Being exposed to radon gas in areas where levels are high can increase your risk of lung cancer. See the website of the Environmental Protection Agency (www.epa.ie) for more information.

What are the symptoms of lung cancer?

- ▶ Wheezing or difficulty breathing.
- ▶ A cough that doesn't go away or a change to an existing cough.
- ▶ Repeated chest infections that won't go away, even after antibiotics.
- ▶ Coughing up blood-stained phlegm.
- ▶ Pain in your chest, especially when you cough or breathe in.
- ▶ Swelling around your face and neck.
- ▶ Difficulty swallowing.
- ▶ Feeling more tired than usual.
- ▶ Loss of appetite or weight loss or both.

These symptoms can be caused by other things, but always get them checked out by your GP.

What should I do if I have any symptoms?

If you have any symptoms or changes in your body that you are worried about, it's important to have them checked by your GP. The chances are it will not be cancer. Getting your symptoms checked is not wasting anyone's time.

How is lung cancer diagnosed?

If your GP thinks your symptoms need to be looked at, you will have more tests. Tests that can help to diagnose lung cancer include the following.

▶ **Chest X-ray**

This checks the general health of your lungs.

▶ **CT scan**

This is a type of X-ray that gives a detailed picture of your airways and lungs.

▶ **Bronchoscopy**

This is when a doctor uses a long tube with a camera at one end to look more directly at the airways in your lungs.

▶ **Lung biopsy**

This is surgery where a doctor takes tissue samples from your lungs and examines them under a microscope.

If you are diagnosed with lung cancer, you can find more information in our booklet.



How can I reduce my risk of lung cancer?



Don't smoke

By far the most important thing you can do to reduce your risk of lung cancer is to stop smoking. Your risk of lung cancer is increased by smoking:

- ▶ Cigarettes
- ▶ Pipes
- ▶ Cigars
- ▶ Hand-rolled cigarettes
- ▶ Low-tar cigarettes

It's never too late to quit. The sooner you stop, the more you reduce your risk. The Irish Cancer Society does not recommend using e-cigarettes as a stop-smoking aid because they are not proven to work. See the end of this leaflet for contact information for the HSE Quit.ie programme.



Avoid second-hand smoke

Breathing in other people's smoke also exposes you to harmful chemicals.



Protect yourself from chemicals and pollutants

Certain chemicals like asbestos, metal, dust, paints, and diesel exhaust can increase your risk. Always follow health and safety instructions.



Look out for any changes that are not normal for you

You are more likely to survive cancer if you spot it at an early stage. Talk to your doctor if you notice anything unusual, like:

- ▶ Pain
- ▶ Unusual bleeding
- ▶ New symptoms that don't clear up after a few weeks

Can I be screened for lung cancer?

Testing for cancer when you have no symptoms is called screening. There is no national lung cancer screening programme in Ireland at present, but the Irish Cancer Society is working to change that. If you are worried or feel you may be at risk, talk to your GP.

Want to stop smoking?

Quitting smoking is one of the best things you can do to reduce your risk of cancer. If you would like advice or support on quitting:

- ▶ Call the HSE Quit Team on CallSave 1800 201 203
- ▶ Freetext QUIT to 50100
- ▶ Visit www.quit.ie

Contact us for more information or support

If you are worried or have questions about lung cancer or any cancer:



Call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700.



Email supportline@irishcancer.ie

We will provide you with confidential advice, support and information.



Ask about a call in your language

Visit our **Daffodil Centres** where our nurses can give advice about how to spot cancer early and how to prevent it. To find out where your local Daffodil Centre is, email daffodilcentreinfo@irishcancer.ie.

Visit our website **www.cancer.ie** for more information on lung cancer and ways you can reduce your risk of cancer.

