

Lung Cancer Screening Frequently Asked Questions

Why is lung cancer screening important?

- Lung cancer causes more deaths in the United States than any other cancer – more than breast, cervix, colon, and prostate cancer combined.
- Lung cancer shows no signs of illness in its early stages.
- Most lung cancers found today are in a late stage.
- After symptoms occur, there is very little chance of curing the cancer.
- About 95 percent of the 173,000 people diagnosed each year die from the disease.
- When found early and treated with surgery, the cure rate is 92 percent (New England Journal of Medicine 2006: 355: 1763-1771).
- Screening before symptoms appear can lower the risk by as much as 20 percent.

Who should be screened for lung cancer?

- People who are at **high risk** for lung cancer.
- People who meet **all** of the following should consider screening:
 1. Age 55 to 77 (Most commercial insurances cover up to 80 years of age.)
 2. Currently smoke tobacco products **or** have quit within the past 15 years and have at least a 30 pack year history of smoking.
 - To determine pack years multiply the number of cigarette packs they have smoked per day by the number of years they have smoked. For example: 1 ½ packs a day smoked over a 30-year period = 45 pack years.
 3. Have a written order from your doctor or other provider.

What is lung cancer screening?

- Your chest is scanned with a special kind of X-ray, Low-Dose Computed Tomography (LDCT).
- LDCT takes high-quality pictures that can show many lung diseases and other problems.

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LDCT lung screening is easy!

- The exam takes fewer than 10 minutes.
- No medicines are given and no needles are used.
- You can eat before and after the exam.
- You do not need to change clothes as long as the clothing on your chest does not contain metal.
- You must, however, be able to hold your breath for at least six seconds while the chest scan is taken.

Are there any risks?

- Your scan may show that you need more testing.
- These tests can cause anxiety and may lead to invasive procedures such as biopsy to further determine whether a finding is a cancer.
- LDCT Lung Screening involves exposure to radiation in the form of X-rays but uses up to 90 percent less radiation than a regular chest CT scan. The benefit of a correct diagnosis far outweighs the risk.

Does my health insurance or Medicare/Medicaid cover lung cancer screening?

- Most health insurance companies will pay for lung cancer screening as long as you are high-risk.

Will this test show other lung problems besides cancer?

- LDCT can show lung infection, TB, emphysema, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), heart disease, thyroid nodules, brittle bones, and many other conditions.

How often should I be screened?

- Once a year if you remain at high risk.
- If problems are found, screening might be done more often.
- A negative scan (no nodules or cancer) does not mean that lung cancer will not develop in the future, especially if you stay at high risk for the disease.

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I'm interested. How do I make an appointment?

- If you meet the high risk standard, please ask your family doctor to see if you should have a lung cancer screening. If you need help finding a family doctor, please call UPMC Susquehanna at 1-877-883-4789.