

Is lung cancer screening right for me?

Screening is a test used to detect lung cancer before any symptoms appear. Screening with low-dose CT (LDCT) scans can reduce deaths in those at high risk. The test is not recommended for everyone and it has risks as well as benefits. Below are key points you may want to use in discussion with your doctor if you are worried about your risk for lung cancer.

Q: Am I a candidate for lung cancer screening?

A: If you meet the following criteria, you are considered to be “high risk” for developing lung cancer and screening is recommended:

- 55-80 years of age
- Have a 30 pack-year history of smoking (this means 1 pack a day for 30 years, 2 packs a day for 15 years, etc.)
- AND, are a current smoker, or have quit within the last 15 years

At this time, there is not enough evidence to show that screening is recommended for other groups.

A note on insurance coverage:

If you are 55-80 years old and have private insurance or 55-77 years old and have Medicare, and meet the other high-risk criteria listed, the initial scan will be covered without cost-sharing. If you meet the criteria above but don't have insurance, you may be eligible for no-cost screening and preventive services that are available through local and state agencies.

Be sure to check with your insurance plan for screening coverage and for any additional procedures—there may be other costs associated even if the actual screening is free. Visit the [Insurance Screening Insurance Checklist](#) for questions to ask your insurance provider.

Q: Why is lung cancer screening only recommended for a certain group of people?

A: Experts look at the available data and use complex equations to determine who should be screened. If you are not in the high-risk group that means data has shown the benefits of screening do not outweigh your risks. However, there are still important ways you can reduce your lung cancer risk, such as eliminating your exposure to tobacco smoke, radon in your home and other hazardous chemicals.

Join the American Lung Association's fight to increase federal funding for cancer research at the National Institutes of Health so there can be improved early detection for lung cancer, as well as better treatments and cures for all. Sign up today at [LungAction.org](#).

Q: How can I reduce my lung cancer risk if I am not a candidate for screening?

A:

- The best way is to never smoke or stop smoking now. If you are still smoking, talk to your doctor or contact the Lung HelpLine (1-800-LUNGUSA) about ways to help you quit smoking. Visit [Lung.org/quit-smoking](https://www.lung.org/quit-smoking) for more information.
- Avoid exposure to secondhand smoke.
- Test your home for radon, an odorless gas that causes lung cancer. Radon can be found in any home. If your home tests high for radon, take steps to repair your home to remove the radon. A certified radon contractor can fix the problem. Learn more at [Lung.org/radon](https://www.lung.org/radon).
- Make sure you are safe around hazardous materials in the workplace and at home.

Q: Should I get an LDCT scan to screen for lung cancer?

A: If you are at high risk, talk with your doctor about getting an LDCT scan to screen for lung cancer. Screening for lung cancer may save your life. Discuss your complete health history and ask for a clear explanation about the possible benefits and risk. There are some risks and not everyone should be screened for lung cancer. Only low-dose CT scans are recommended for screening. Chest x-rays are not recommended for lung cancer screening.

Q: What happens if I choose to get an LDCT scan for lung cancer?

A: There is some radiation risk with an LDCT scan and you may need to have additional tests and procedures. You should go to a hospital or screening center that has a team of experts who will clearly explain the procedure to you. The team should tell you about all the risks and benefits of the screening. They should also discuss what the results can mean and how they will follow up with you after the initial screening.

Q: What do results mean?

A: A “positive” result means that the LDCT scan shows something is abnormal. This could mean lung cancer. It could also mean some other condition. You may need to have additional procedures to find out exactly what is abnormal. If you do have lung cancer or some other condition, your doctor and the team of experts should discuss all possible treatment options with you.

A “negative” result means there were no abnormal findings at this time and on this LDCT scan. It does not mean you absolutely do not have lung cancer. It does not mean that you will never get lung cancer. Your doctor should discuss when and if you should be tested again.

There may also be an “indeterminate” result and your doctor may recommend watchful follow-up and further imaging at a later time.

The best way to prevent lung cancer is to never smoke or stop smoking now. If you are still smoking, talk to your doctor about ways to help you quit smoking.

Q: Where can I get more information about lung cancer and lung cancer screening?

A: The American Lung Association has a variety of lung cancer screening resources for patients and healthcare professionals. Visit [Lung.org/lcscreening](https://www.lung.org/lcscreening) or call the Lung Cancer HelpLine at 1-844-ALA-LUNG for more information.