

Lung Cancer

Lung cancer is the most common cancer in men and women combined. It has a strong relationship with cigarette smoking and less so with asbestos exposure.

There are various categories of lung cancer. They are broadly categorized as small cell and non-small cell lung cancer. This distinction has implications concerning the natural development of the cancers as well as the type of treatment indicated and the expected outcome. Because of the non-specificity of symptoms patients often present late. Symptoms, which should alert patients, include coughing up of blood, increasing shortness of breath, persistent cough or change in the nature of a chronic cough, hoarseness and chest pain. General symptoms include weight loss and tiredness. Patients may also present with symptoms secondary to spreading of the disease to other parts of the body.

To establish a diagnosis and to determine the extent of disease the following investigations are useful:

- Chest X-ray
- Bronchoscopy with biopsy of suspicious areas in the lung. Cells can also be obtained through needle aspiration of the tumor mass. Sometimes more invasive procedures are necessary to obtain a definite diagnosis
- CT scan of the chest
- Ultrasound or CT scan of the upper abdomen
- Radio-isotope scans
- Blood tests

Your doctor may require further investigations depending on your symptoms at presentation.

Treatment options

Treatment will depend on the nature and extent of the disease as well as on your general state of health.
Non-small cell lung cancer:

Treatment options include surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy and various combinations of these modalities in various sequences. The choice of therapy will be determined by the stage of disease, co-existing medical disorders (e.g. emphysema, diabetes, cardiac problems) and general well-being. The decision regarding treatment will be made in consultation with you as the patient.

Small cell lung cancer:

Chemotherapy plays a pivotal role in the treatment of small cell lung cancer. Often treatment options as mentioned above may be employed in addition, depending on the stage of the disease and the general condition and choice of the patient.

The foregoing information is quite generalized. The specifics of your disease and treatment should be discussed with your oncologist to establish the optimal treatment plan for you as an individual.