

Diagnosing Lung Cancer - A Quick Guide



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This is a brief summary of the information on 'Diagnosing lung cancer' from CancerHelp UK. You will find more detailed information on the website.

In this information there are sections on

- Lung cancer tests
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- Questions for your doctor

Lung cancer tests

Usually you begin by seeing your family doctor, who will ask you about your general health and examine you. Your GP will then refer you to hospital for any X-rays or other tests you may need. You will be asked to go for a chest X-ray to check for anything that looks abnormal in your lungs.

Hospital tests

At the hospital the doctor will ask about your medical history and your symptoms. They will then probably arrange for you to have some tests.

A test called a bronchoscopy looks at the inside of the airways. The doctor puts a narrow, flexible tube down your throat or nose and into the airway. You usually have this under local anaesthetic. But you may

have a sedative or general anaesthetic. The doctor can take a biopsy using the bronchoscope.

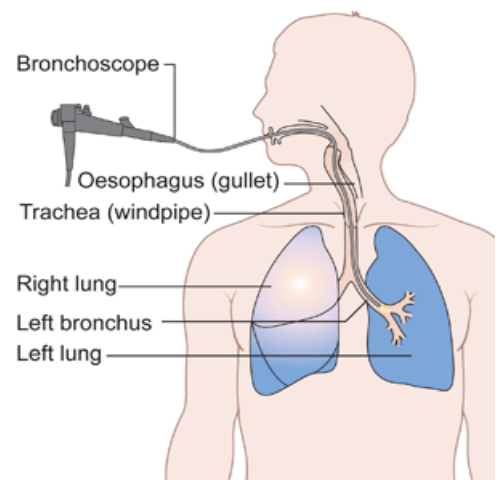


Diagram showing a bronchoscopy
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You may have a CT scan that takes X-rays through sections of your body. Or you might have a PET-CT scan. This is a combination of a PET scan and a CT scan. The CT scan takes pictures of the structures of your body. At the same time, a mildly radioactive dye shows up areas of your body where the cells are more active than normal.



Biopsy through the skin

For this test, the doctor uses a thin needle to take samples of cells for examination under the microscope. The doctor will ask you to hold your breath for a minute while they put the needle through the skin into the lung. The test can be uncomfortable but only takes a few minutes.

Further tests for lung cancer

If your tests show you have lung cancer, you may need further tests. The further tests show if the cancer has spread and can help your doctor decide on the best treatment. These tests may include an endobronchial ultrasound scan or an endoscopic ultrasound scan. The scans can help to show the size of the tumour and whether the cancer has spread into any lymph nodes. The doctor can also pass a hollow needle down the tube to take an ultrasound guided biopsy of any enlarged lymph nodes or any lung tissue that looks abnormal.

You may have a thoracoscopy. The doctor puts a thin tube into a cut in the side of your chest. Through the tube, the doctor looks for anything abnormal and can take tissue or fluid samples. Or you may have a mediastinoscopy. The doctor puts the tube through a small cut at the base of the neck and into an area in the centre of your chest called the mediastinum.

Other possible tests are a bone scan, a brain CT scan, a PET-CT scan or MRI scan. If the tumour is very close to the top of your chest you may have an MRI scan of your chest area.

After the tests

Your doctor will ask you to come back to the hospital when your test results have come through. But this is bound to take a little time, even if only a few days. This is a very anxious time for most people. While you are waiting it may help to talk to a close friend or relative about how you are feeling. Or you may want to contact a cancer support group to talk to someone who has been through the same experiences.

What to ask your doctor about lung cancer tests

- What tests are you going to do?
- What are you looking for?
- Will the tests show whether I have cancer?
- Are the tests painful and how reliable are they?
- Do any of the tests have after effects?
- Can I have all the tests as an out patient?
- Can I choose whether to have a sedative or general anaesthetic for any of the tests?
- Can I bring someone with me when I have the tests?
- How long will it take to get the results of the tests?
- Who will give me the test results?



Notes

More information

For more information about lung cancer, visit our website
<http://cancerhelp.cancerresearchuk.org>

You will find a wide range of detailed, up to date information for people affected by cancer, including a clinical trials database that you can search for cancer trials in the UK. You can view or print the information in a larger size if you need to.

For answers to your questions about cancer call our Cancer Information Nurses on **0808 800 4040** 9am till 5pm Monday to Friday

Adapted from Cancer Research UK's Patient Information Website CancerHelp UK in April 2011. CancerHelp UK is not designed to provide medical advice or professional services and is intended to be for educational use only. The information provided through CancerHelp UK and our nurse team is not a substitute for professional care and should not be used for diagnosing or treating a health problem or disease. If you have, or suspect you may have, a health problem you should consult your doctor. © Cancer Research UK 2011. Cancer Research UK is a registered charity in England and Wales (1089464) and in Scotland (SC041666).