

Lung Cancer Screening

What is lung cancer screening?

Lung cancer screening is a quick and painless way to check for lung cancer in its earliest stages. In the general population, about 9 out of 10 of people with lung cancer die from the disease. This high number is, in part, because lung cancer often isn't caught until symptoms appear. By the time symptoms appear, the cancer has usually spread to other parts of the body, making it harder to treat.

Screening helps doctors find small tumors or nodules (masses of extra cells) in the lungs before they grow or spread to other parts of the body. Finding cancer early means it is easier to treat, and the chances of being cancer-free improve greatly.

Who should be screened?

Screening is recommended for anyone at high risk for lung cancer. High risk is defined as those who match all of the following:

- Aged 55 to 77.
- Have a smoking history of 30 or more “pack years.” Thirty pack years means 30 years of smoking at least one pack of cigarettes a day. Fifteen years of 2 packs a day also equals 30 pack years.
- Still smoke or quit smoking in the last 15 years.
- No signs or symptoms of lung cancer.
- Willing to have treatment if cancer is found.

Smoking is the biggest risk factor for lung cancer and causes more than 8 of every 10 lung cancers. The more you smoke, the higher your risk of developing lung cancer. The risk goes down if you quit. If you're not sure whether you should be screened, talk to your doctor. Your risk factors, medical history, personal beliefs, and other factors are an important part of making this decision.



Lung cancer screening requires a CT scan. A CT scanner takes images of your lungs so that your doctor can see anything abnormal.

I meet the criteria. Why should I be screened?

Screening gives you a chance to catch cancer early. If it's caught early, experts estimate that up to 8 out of 10 lung cancers could be successfully treated. Catching the cancer early means that the tumors can be removed before they spread to other parts of the body.

Screening sometimes finds other problems. Treating these problems can also improve your health.

How often should I be screened?

People who are considered **high risk** should be screened **once a year**. If you turn 77, have quit smoking for more than 15 years, or cannot tolerate surgery or treatment, then screening is no longer recommended.

What happens during the screening?

You'll need to go to the hospital for your screening appointment. Once in the exam room, you'll lie on your back on a table with your arms above your head. While you hold your breath (just for a brief time), the CT scanner rotates to take pictures of your lungs.

Some people dislike the tight spaces of CT scans. It may help to know that your head will be outside of the scanner throughout the scan and it only takes a few seconds. A healthcare provider called a technician can also see and hear you throughout the scan.



Will the radiation hurt me?

During your screen, you are exposed to a small amount of radiation. However, we are all exposed to small amounts of radiation every day (called “background radiation”). The extra radiation from the screening is very small—less than you would receive from background radiation in about 6 months.

The benefits of finding lung cancer early outweigh the risks of radiation exposure.

What is the Intermountain Lung Cancer Screening Program?

Intermountain's Lung Cancer Screening Program provides yearly CT lung screening and tracks your visits and results.

Once you enroll in the program, you'll receive letters in the mail to remind you when it's time for your next screening. After your screening, a doctor will look at the images of your lungs to see if there is anything abnormal. You'll receive a letter in the mail with your results. If there is something abnormal on your scan, you will be asked to make follow-up appointments and to have additional tests.

Talk to your doctor for more information about the program.

Trying to quit?

The most important thing you can do to reduce your risk of developing lung cancer is to **quit smoking**. Ask your doctor about Intermountain's **Quitting Tobacco: Your Journey to Freedom** booklet.



Programs

If you need additional support, these programs can help:

- Quit for Life Program, 800-QUIT-NOW, 866-784-8454, quitnow.net
- Freedom from Smoking, ffsonline.org

National organizations

- American Lung Association, 800-586-4872 (Lung HelpLine), lung.org/stop-smoking
- American Cancer Society, 800-227-2345, cancer.org
- American Heart Association, 800-242-8721, americanheart.org

More helpful websites

- cdc.gov/tobacco
- smokefree.gov
- nicotine-anonymous.org
- whyquit.com

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