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If You Have a Lung Carcinoid Tumor

If you or someone you know has just been diagnosed with a **lung carcinoid tumor**, this short guide can help. Find information on lung carcinoid tumors here.

- [What is a lung carcinoid tumor?](#)
- [How will the doctor know if I have a lung carcinoid tumor?](#)
- [How serious is my cancer?](#)
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What is a lung carcinoid tumor?

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The lungs

The lungs are 2 sponge-like organs found in the chest. The right lung has 3 parts, called **lobes**. The left lung has 2 lobes. The left lung is smaller because the heart takes up more room on that side of the body. The lungs bring air in and push it out of the body. They take in oxygen and get rid of carbon dioxide, a waste product.

The **windpipe, or trachea**, brings air down into the lungs. It splits into 2 tubes (large airways) called **bronchi**. (Just 1 is called a bronchus.) The **bronchioles** are smaller airways that branch off from the bronchi.

Are there different kinds of lung carcinoid tumors?

There are two [types of lung carcinoid tumors](#)²:

- **Typical carcinoids** tend to grow slowly and rarely spread beyond the lungs. They also do not seem to be linked with smoking.
- **Atypical carcinoids** grow a little faster and are somewhat more likely to spread to other organs. They are much less common than typical carcinoids and may be found more often in people who smoke.

There are also other types of lung cancer that are more common than lung carcinoid tumors. See [Lung Cancer](#)³ to learn more.

Questions to ask the doctor

- Why do you think I might have a lung carcinoid tumor?
- Could my symptoms be caused by something else?
- Would you please write down the kind of cancer you think I might have?
- What will happen next?

How will the doctor know if I have a lung carcinoid tumor?

[Symptoms of lung carcinoid tumors](#)⁴ are cough, chest pain, and trouble breathing. The doctor will ask you about your health and do a physical exam.

If signs point to a lung carcinoid tumor, more tests will be done. Here are some of the [tests you may need](#)⁵:

Chest x-ray: This is often the first test used to look for spots on your lungs. If a change is seen, you will need more tests.

CT scan: This is also called a “CAT scan.” A CT scan is a special kind of x-ray that takes pictures of your insides. CT scans are sometimes used when doing a biopsy (see below).

PET scan: Before this test, a special radioactive material is put into a vein with an IV. This substance travels through your blood and is attracted to areas of cancer. Then, pictures of your insides are taken with a special camera. If there is cancer, the material shows up as “hot spots” where the cancer is found. This test is useful when your doctor

thinks the cancer has spread, but doesn't know where.

get surgery to try to cure the cancer.

- If your cancer is *not resectable* (not able to be removed with surgery), it will be harder to treat. You might still have some kind of surgery, but if that is not a good option, your doctor might recommend chemotherapy or radiation.

Be sure to ask your doctor about the stage of your cancer and what it might mean for you.

Questions to ask the doctor

- Do you know the stage of the cancer?
- If not, how and when will you find out the stage of the cancer?
- Would you explain to me what the stage means in my case?
- Based on the stage of the cancer, how long do you think I'll live?
- Can my cancer be removed with surgery? Is surgery an option to treat my cancer?
- What will happen next?

What kind of treatment will I need?

The treatment plan that is best for you depends on the stage of your cancer, your age and overall health, the possibility the cancer can be removed completely with surgery, and other factors. [Treatment options](#)⁷ include:

- Surgery
- Radiation therapy or radioactive drugs
- Chemotherapy or other drugs

Surgery

Surgery is the main treatment for lung carcinoid tumors whenever possible. If the tumor hasn't spread, it can often be cured by just doing surgery.

Types of lung surgery

Different types of surgery (also called operations) can be used to treat and possibly cure lung carcinoid tumors. These operations require general anesthesia (where you are in a deep sleep) and are usually done through a surgical cut between the ribs in the side of

the chest (called a **thoracotomy**).

- **Pneumonectomy:** An entire lung is removed.
- **Lobectomy:** An entire section (lobe) of a lung is removed.
- **Segmentectomy or wedge resection:** Part of a lobe is removed.

Checking lymph nodes during surgery

Radioactive drugs

Radioactive drugs are another kind of radiation therapy. These are drugs that combine radioactive material with another substance that's attracted to lung carcinoid tumors. This lets doctors deliver high doses of radiation directly to the tumors. Radioactive drugs are put into your blood with an IV, like getting chemo. The most common side effects are nausea, kidney and liver problems, low white blood counts, low platelet counts, and vomiting.

Chemo

Chemo is the short word for *chemotherapy* – the use of drugs to fight cancer. Most carcinoid tumors are not treated with chemo, but sometimes it's helpful if the tumors have spread or are causing severe symptoms. It's also used if other treatments aren't working, or for tumors that are growing fast. Some people who get surgery as their main treatment may need chemo after.

The drugs may be given through a needle into a vein or taken as pills. These drugs go into the blood and spread through the body.

Chemo is given in cycles or rounds. There's often a rest period as part of each cycle of treatment. This gives the body time to recover. Chemo drugs can be used together or alone, and often along with other types of drugs. Treatment often lasts for many months.

Side effects of chemo

Chemo can have many side effects, like:

- Hair loss
- Mouth sores
- Not feeling like eating
- Diarrhea
- Feeling sick to your stomach and throwing up
- More risk of infections
- Bruising and bleeding easily
- Tiredness

But these problems tend to go away after treatment ends. There are ways to treat most chemo side effects. Be sure to talk to your cancer care team so they can help.

Other drugs

People with lung carcinoid tumors that have spread might be treated with other kinds of drugs.

One drug, everolimus (Afinitor[®]) is sometimes used to treat lung carcinoid tumors when chemo doesn't work. Getting this drug is a lot like getting chemo, but it works differently. It's called **targeted therapy** drug because it targets specific parts of cancer cells. Side effects can include diarrhea, feeling very tired (fatigue), rash, mouth sores, and swelling in your legs or arms.

Other drugs, like octreotide and lanreotide, can sometimes slow the growth of lung carcinoid tumors or help with symptoms. These drugs are given as injections (shots) under the skin.

Clinical trials

Clinical trials are research studies that test new drugs or other treatments in people. They compare standard treatments with others that may be better.

Clinical trials are one way to the newest cancer treatment. They are the best way for

Questions to ask the doctor

- What treatment do you think is best for me?
- What is the goal of this treatment? Do you think it could cure the cancer?
- Will treatment include surgery? If so, what will the surgery be like?
- Will I need other types of treatment, too?
- What's the goal of these treatments?
- What side effects could I have from these treatments?
- What can I do about side effects that I might have?
- Is there a clinical trial that might be right for me?
- What about vitamins or diets that friends tell me about? How will I know if they are safe?
- How soon do I need to start treatment?
- What should I do to be ready for treatment?
- Is there anything I can do to help the treatment work better?
- What's the next step?

What will happen after treatment?

You'll be glad [when treatment is over](#)¹¹. But it's hard not to worry about cancer coming back. Even when cancer never comes back, people still worry about this.

For years after treatment ends, you will see your cancer doctor. Be sure to go to all of these follow-up visits. You will have exams, blood tests, and maybe other tests, like CT scans or octreotide scans, to tell if the cancer has come back.

For the first year after treatment, your visits may be every 3 months. You may have CT scans and blood tests. After the first year or so, your visits might be every 6 months, and then at least once a year after 5 years.

Having cancer and dealing with treatment can be hard, but it can also be a time to look at your life in new ways. You might be thinking about how to improve your health. Call us at 1-800-227-2345 or talk to your cancer care team to find out what you can do to feel better.

You can't change the fact that you have cancer. What you can change is how you live the rest of your life – making healthy choices and feeling as well as you can.

[For connecting and sharing during a cancer journey](#)

Anyone with cancer, their caregivers, families, and friends, can benefit from help and support. The American Cancer Society offers the Cancer Survivors Network (CSN), a safe place to connect with others who share similar interests and experiences. We also partner with CaringBridge, a free online tool that helps people dealing with illnesses like cancer stay in touch with their friends, family members, and support network by creating their own personal page where they share their journey and health updates.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/understanding-cancer/what-is-cancer.html
2. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/lung-carcinoid-tumor/about/what-is-lung-carcinoid-tumor.html
3. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/lung-cancer.html
4. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/lung-carcinoid-tumor/detection-diagnosis-staging/signs-and-symptoms.html
5. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/lung-carcinoid-tumor/detection-diagnosis-staging/how-diagnosed.html
6. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/lung-carcinoid-tumor/detection-diagnosis-staging/staging.html
7. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/lung-carcinoid-tumor/treating.html
8. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/making-treatment-decisions/clinical-trials.html
9. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/alternative-medicine.html
10. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/complementary-and-integrative-medicine.html
11. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/lung-carcinoid-tumor/after-treatment/follow-up.html
12. www.cancer.org

Words to know

Biopsy (BY-op-see): taking out a piece of tissue to see if there are cancer cells in it

Bronchoscopy (brong-KOS-kuh-pee): use of a thin, lighted, flexible tube that's passed through the mouth into the bronchi of the lungs. The doctor can look through the tube to find tumors or to take out a piece of tumor or fluids to test for cancer cells.

Bronchus (BRONG-kus) plural **bronchi** (BRONG-ki): in the lungs, the 2 main air passages leading from the windpipe or trachea. The bronchi are the tubes that allow air

to move in and out of the lungs.

Metastasis (muh-TAS-tuh-sis): cancer cells that have spread from where they started