

I have lung cancer – would it help if I stopped smoking?



Finding out you have lung cancer can be very distressing. If you do smoke, there are real benefits to stopping. For example:

- cancer treatment is safer for you
- you can expect to respond better to your treatment, and
- in the longer term, you will reduce your chances of having your cancer come back

These benefits are on top of the improvements you could expect in your heart, lungs and general health.

Why is smoking such a problem?

Tobacco smoke is the most poisonous material to which people are regularly exposed. Even low levels of smoking, as well as breathing in second-hand smoke, is particularly harmful to you if you have lung cancer, both during treatment and after.

Smoke includes more than 7,000 toxic chemicals and these poisons get into your system very easily through your lungs. Some of the poisons include arsenic, butane (cigarette lighter gas), formaldehyde (used to preserve bodies), acetone (nail varnish remover and paint stripper) and methanol (rocket fuel).

There is no safe level of exposure, and smoking tobacco is very harmful in any form, including cigars, pipes, or shisha through a waterpipe.

How will stopping smoking help me?

Stopping smoking is good for anyone. It's even more important if you have lung cancer and are starting treatment, such as surgery, chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

Smoking directly damages DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid), the genetic blueprint that controls our development and body function.

Tobacco smoke also contains high levels of carbon monoxide. In combination with some of the other chemicals, this can increase breathlessness, make you feel sick and stop you getting a good night's sleep.

It also narrows blood vessels, and this reduces the amount of chemotherapy drug reaching the cells.

Carbon monoxide replaces oxygen in blood, and this can slow down any healing, and reduce the effectiveness of treatments such as radiotherapy. Many of the drugs used to manage the side-effects of treatments and cancer symptoms don't work as well because of it and the many other chemicals in tobacco.

So, treatment is safer and works better for those who have been able to quit smoking.

More generally, symptoms are improved and quality of life is improved by stopping smoking even when the lung cancer is more advanced.

Having lung cancer and getting treatment may be very emotional and stressful for you. It also puts extra stress on your body and this can increase your risk of heart attack and stroke, and serious lung infections are also more likely. Stopping smoking will help reduce these risks too.

Time from stopping and beneficial health changes

3 hours – Heart rate and blood pressure are lower reducing the strain on your heart.

12 hours – Blood carbon monoxide level drops to normal increasing blood's capacity to carry oxygen.

4 weeks – Surgical wounds heal better reducing by 90% the chance of having a wound infection.

12 weeks – Circulation improves and the chance of heart attack and stroke start to reduce.

1-9 months – Coughing and shortness of breath decrease reducing the risk of lung infections.

1 year – Risk of coronary heart disease is about half that of a smoker.

I see the benefits and want to stop – what will help me?

Find out as much as you can about the options. Think about other ways of getting nicotine that don't involve burning tobacco, avoid your usual smoking triggers, and set achievable daily goals.

There are many more smokers who have been able to stop than who keep smoking. It can be done!

The people close to you and others who care for you and about you, including your doctors and nurses, will certainly help and encourage you.

Most smokers are dependent in some way on the nicotine in the smoke. Nicotine is as addictive as heroin and cocaine. As well as this, the tobacco industry adds chemicals to increase nicotine uptake, and flavours such as honey, sugar, caramel and menthol to keep people smoking (and spending more on it).

It's not all about nicotine. The process of smoking becomes a habit, or routine. You may notice a greater urge to smoke in certain places or with certain people, or when doing certain things. When trying to stop, it's a good idea to have a plan:

- Try not to smoke at home or in your car.
- Always arrange to meet up with friends in places where smoking is not allowed.
- Tell your friends and family that you are stopping smoking to help with your treatment and that you would like their support and encouragement.
- Tell your friends and family not to offer you a cigarette or smoke near you. Suggest to them to stop smoking with you. Having a stop-smoking buddy will help your motivation.

Advice from your lung cancer team may be all you need, with or without, for example, nicotine replacement patches or chewing gum. If you are already using electronic cigarettes, tell your medical team as you may need to adjust how you use them during your treatment.

Speaking to a specialist health advisor or counsellor may help you more, particularly if you have tried to stop in the past without success. Some medicines can also help with smoking cravings. Ask your doctor or nurse about what could be best for you.

Should I tell my doctor or carers that I am smoking?

Many people worry about this. However, doctors and nurses know how addictive smoking is, and how much it has been promoted. They won't blame you for having lung cancer that may have been caused by smoking or for the fact that you have not yet been able to stop smoking.

Lung cancer medical specialists and nurses, and other professionals involved in your treatment and care, treat everyone equally. If they ask you if you smoke, or if you have smoked, this is not to judge you. It is because they may need to do extra tests to make sure that you get the best treatment.

By telling them that you are still smoking, or have started smoking again, they will be better able to support and treat you, and, with your permission, can refer you to a smoking cessation specialist.

Summary

Stopping smoking is good for your health. Anyone with cancer will respond to and deal with the effects of treatments better if you don't smoke. It will help you avoid further illness including new cancers, heart and lung disease, as well as reduce your risk of having a stroke.

Healthcare providers across the world are committed to helping people to stop smoking, and there have never been so many choices to help you succeed.

Take each day at a time, learn about your smoking triggers and what works for you.

Above all, keep going!



**GLOBAL LUNG CANCER
COALITION**

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This information leaflet has been produced by the Global Lung Cancer Coalition (GLCC) secretariat and reviewed by lung cancer experts. For more information on the support and information services available in your country, visit www.lungcancercoalition.org Version 1.0 – July 2017.