



KAISER PERMANENTE®

Cancer of the Lung

Lung cancer is the uncontrolled growth of cells in the lungs. As these cells grow and multiply, they invade normal lung tissues and form cancerous tumors. Unless they are stopped, these wild cells spread throughout the body and start cancerous growths elsewhere. When cancer begins in the lung, it's called "primary" lung cancer. When cancer from another part of the body spreads to the lung, it's called "metastatic" lung cancer.

Most lung cancer can be prevented by not smoking. While environmental irritants and pollutants may also cause cancer, 90 percent of all primary lung cancer occurs in people who smoke cigarettes. Sixty years ago, when smoking was less common, lung cancer was a rare disease. Today, however, it is the leading cause of cancer deaths in men and women. Therefore, if you smoke, plan on quitting soon. If you do, you will stop doing damage to your lungs and your body may be able to repair the damage already done. In addition, you'll reduce your risk of heart disease, other lung diseases, and cancer in other parts of the body.

Unfortunately, lung cancer often does not give any early warning signals. All too often, the person feels fine until the cancer has been growing and spreading for some time. By the time symptoms appear, it may be too late to cure the cancer.

Consult your health care professional immediately if you experience any of the following five possible symptoms of lung cancer:

- 1.) a new, unexplained cough;
- 2.) chest pain;
- 3.) coughing-up blood-streaked sputum;
- 4.) shortness of breath;
- 5.) loss of weight or physical strength.

If your health care professional suspects the chance of lung cancer, a chest X-ray may be scheduled. If a mass is confirmed by the X-ray, a sputum specimen may further help in the diagnosis. Depending on the location of the mass, your doctor may want to look into the airways of your lungs using an instrument called a bronchoscope. This method can help determine whether there is cancer. Finally, a biopsy can help specify the type of lung cancer that's present.

If cancer is diagnosed—and if the cancer can be removed completely—the preferred treatment is usually surgical removal of the cancerous mass. Radiation therapy is often the preferred treatment for those cancers that cannot be removed completely. One type of lung cancer—small

cell, or oat cell—is best treated with chemotherapy. Unfortunately, in many cases, treatment of lung cancer is not effective in the long run. Preventing lung cancer by not smoking or by not breathing second-hand smoke is really critical.



For additional health information you can trust:

- Log on to our members-only Web site at www.kaiserpermanente.org/california, then click the "Kaiser Permanente Members Only" button
- Visit your local Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center
- Check your Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone messages at 1-800-33 ASK ME (1-800-332-7563)

To get your free Handbook and Healthphone Directory, call 1-800-464-4000.

The information presented here is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of professional medical care. If you have persistent health problems or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor or other health care professional.

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REGIONAL HEALTH EDUCATION