

Medical News

5 things to know about lung cancer



Lung cancer is the country's leading cause of cancer death. Many of the 160,000 deaths from lung cancer in the U.S. can be prevented. Dr. Bruce Johnson, the director of the Lowe Center for Thoracic Oncology at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, sorts out the facts about lung cancer and offers simple ways to reduce risk.

1. Lung cancer targets more than just smokers.

The greatest risk factor for lung cancer is smoking, but nonsmokers can also develop lung cancer. About 10 to 15 percent of lung cancer cases occur in nonsmokers, many of them women.

2. Know the warning signs. They can be subtle but symptoms to be aware of include a cough that does not go away, shortness of breath, back and shoulder pain, and coughing up blood. This could be a sign of something serious and should be discussed with a doctor.

3. It's never too late to quit smoking. People who stop and remain a nonsmoker for at least 10 to 20 years can cut their risk of developing lung cancer by 50 to 75 percent.

4. CT screenings can save lives. Lung cancer can be difficult to detect and, until recently, there has not been a good screening test. But results from the National Lung Screening Trial suggest that screening high-risk people with low-dose CT scans can detect tumors at an earlier stage, resulting in improved lung cancer survival. Screening is currently recommended for people who are between the ages of 55 and 74 and who have smoked a pack a day for 30 years and quit fewer than 15 years ago.

5. New therapies show promise. Thanks to advances in the last decade, new targeted therapies offer more treatment options for patients.