

Welcome to the Lung Cancer Screening Decision Tool

A DECISION AID DESIGNED FOR VETERANS

Is Lung Cancer Screening the Right Decision for You?

- Welcome to the Lung Cancer Screening Decision tool. This is a program designed for Veterans that are eligible for lung cancer screening. The program will provide information on both the benefits and potential harms of lung cancer screening and help you to make a decision that is best for you.
- You can review this tool on your own or with your health care provider.
- There are parts of the tool that may be especially helpful to share with your provider. We will point out those parts as you go through the program.
- You can also print out the program and use as a work sheet to help you think about whether lung cancer screening is right for you.

Follow this conversation between a patient and doctor about Lung Cancer Screening

Hello, I want to talk to you about Lung Cancer Screening.

Why is this important to me?

Lung cancer is the number one cause of cancer deaths in the United States. Smoking contributes to most of these deaths in both men and women.

What type of test is used for Lung Cancer Screening?

ACT scan (or special x-ray) of the lungs.

The Conversation Continues....

What is the CT scan likely to find?

The CT scan may detect lung cancer before it causes symptoms

The CT scan could be normal or find a spot on the lung. The spot is called a nodule.

If the nodule is very small you may need to have repeat CT scans to follow it to see if it grows.

The conversation continues....

Does a False Positive mean that someone made a mistake?

If the nodule is large you may need a biopsy to check for cancer.

Most nodules turn out not to be cancer. These are called False Positives

Good question but no. This is expected to happen as part of lung cancer screening. Some people call these false alarms.

The conversation continues...

Is this test
right for me?

It may be. Lung cancer screening
can find cancers at an earlier stage
and in some cases improve
survival.

However, follow-up tests can be
stressful, require travel or cost
money and time.

It is important to consider
benefits and potential harms
and make the right decision for
you.

6 Key Facts in 6 Pages

Learn More about Lung Cancer Screening

Guidelines

False Positives

Overdiagnosis

Exposure to Radiation

Significant Incidental Findings

Lung Cancer Survival

What are the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) Lung Cancer Screening Guidelines?

- You are eligible for lung cancer screening if you are
 - A heavy smoker (a pack a day for 20 years or more)
 - 50 to 80 years old
 - Current smoker or quit within 15 years
 - Healthy enough to have treatment if lung cancer is found.
- If your CT scan is normal, you will continue to have screening every year. If a nodule is found, you will either need further tests or a follow-up CT scan in 3 to 6 months.

What is a False Positive Test?

- A false positive test is an abnormal finding on a CT scan (a nodule or spot) that with further testing turns out not to be cancer.
- Some people call these false alarms.
- Evidence from a large study called the National Lung Screening Trial finds that for 1000 people who have a CT scan every year for 3 years, 365 people will have a false positive.

Reference:

<https://www.cancer.gov/types/lung/research/nlststudyguidepateintsphysicians.pdf> 3/24/2025

What is Overdiagnosis?

- Overdiagnosis is a lung cancer that is found by screening but is so slow growing that it would never have been found or caused you harm if you did not have the screening test.
- Evidence from the National Lung Screening Trial finds that about 1 out of 5 lung cancers found by screening are an overdiagnosis. However, the exact number is not known.
- The problem with overdiagnosis is that it can lead to cancer treatment that was not necessary (also called overtreatment).

Reference: Patz EF, JAMA Intern Med 2014

Is Radiation from a Low Dose CT scan Dangerous?

- The lung cancer screening CT scan uses a lower dose of radiation than a usual CT scan of the lungs. However, there is a small risk that over time this radiation may cause cancer.
- This chance is . About 5 out of every 10,000 people who have lung cancer screening for 10 years will develop a major cancer that is due to the radiation exposure from lung cancer screening.

Reference: Rampinelli C, BMJ 2017

What is a Significant Incidental Finding?

- The lung cancer screening CT scan may find an abnormality that is not in the lung (such as heart disease or a thyroid nodule).
- These findings may then lead to additional tests.
- Findings that are outside of the lung and not what you were looking for when screening, were found to happen in 137 of 1000 lung cancer screening tests.

Reference: National Lung Screening Trial, Nguyen, J Am Coll Radiol, 2017

Will Lung Cancer Screening Improve my Chance of Survival ?

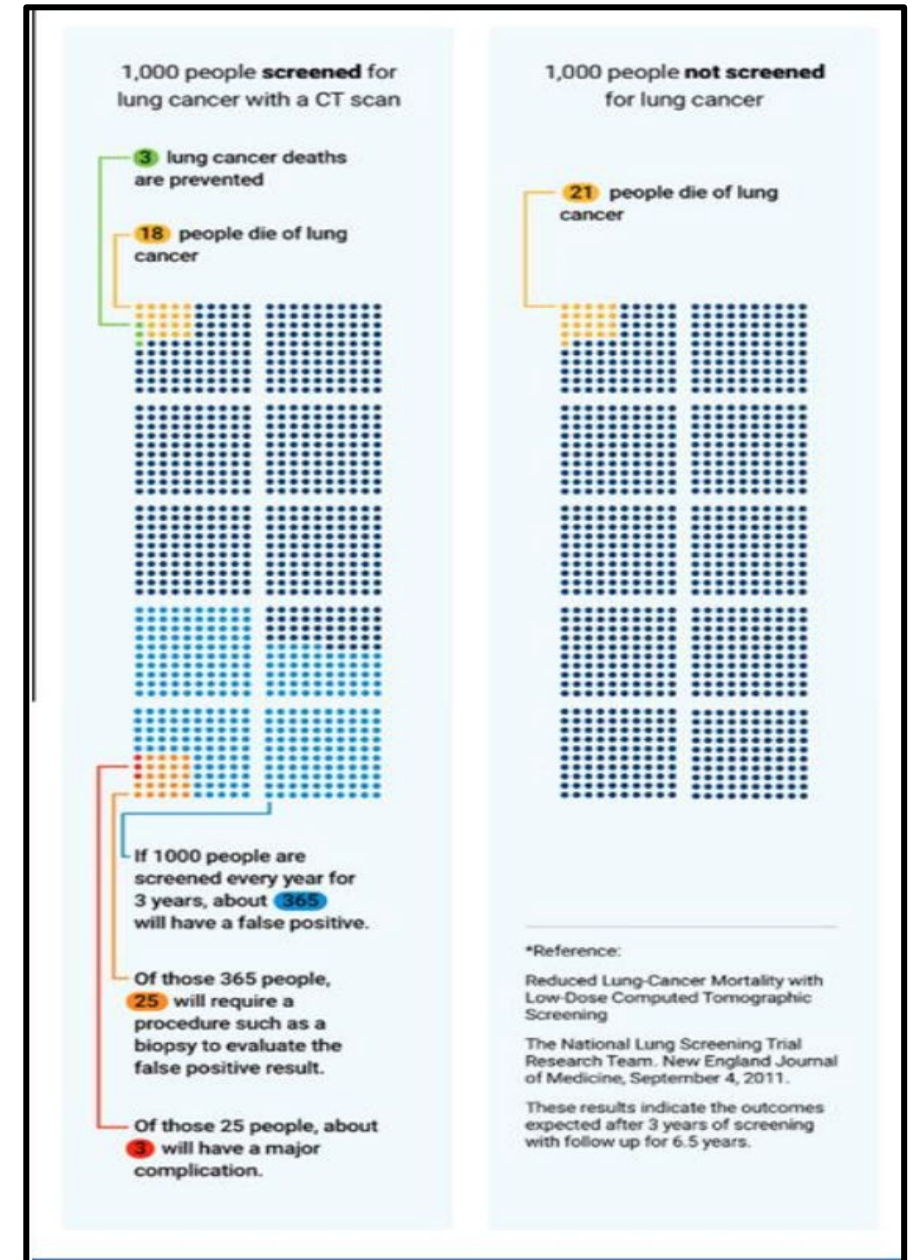
- Lung cancer screening will decrease the chance of dying from lung cancer from **21 out of 1000** to **18 out of 1000**.
- Another way to say this is that lung cancer screening lowers your chance of dying from lung cancer by 20%.
- The most important way to prevent lung cancer is to stop smoking.
- The next page will show you the risk of these outcomes using a picture.

Reference: The National Lung Cancer Screening Trial Research Team, N Engl J Med, 2011.

Results of the National Lung Screening Trial

- Of 1000 people screened every year for 3 years
 - About 21 people will be diagnosed with lung cancer
 - Of these, 18 will die of lung cancer
 - And 3 lung cancer deaths will be prevented
 - About 365 will have a false positive test
 - Of these, 25 will need a procedure such as a biopsy to evaluate the false positive test
 - Of these, 3 will have a complication of the procedure
- Without lung cancer screening
 - Of 1000 people, about 21 people will die of lung cancer every year

Discuss this picture with your provider



Additional Outcomes of Lung Cancer Screening

➤ **Overdiagnosis**

Some of the new cancers that are found (**about 1 in 5**) are so slow growing that they would never have caused you harm if not found by screening. This could lead to unnecessary cancer treatment.

➤ **Radiation Exposure**

Over time, the radiation from low dose CT scans of the lungs can lead to a small increase in cancer. This is thought to happen in **5 out of 10,000** people who have lung cancer screening for 10 years.

➤ **Significant Incidental Findings**

Lung cancer screening may find abnormalities that are not lung cancer such as heart disease or other types of lung disease. These may require further testing. This occurs in about **137 out of every 1000** screening tests.

Weighing Benefits and Potential Harms of Lung Cancer Screening

- The next few pages will ask you to show how you value both the benefits and potential harms of lung cancer screening.
- Print these pages and check the boxes to show what is important or concerning to you about lung cancer screening.
- You can then share these pages with your health care provider as you discuss whether lung cancer screening is right for you.

1. How important to you is the following benefit of lung cancer screening?

The risk of dying from lung cancer decreases from 21 out of 1000 to 18 out of 1000 person

Not
important

Slightly
important

Moderately
important

Very
important

Extremely
important



Discuss this
answer with
your provider

2. How concerned are you about having a false positive test?

Check the box that shows how you feel

Not at all
concerned

A little
concerned

Moderately
concerned

Very
concerned

Extremely
concerned

Discuss this
answer with
your provider



3. How concerned are you about experiencing a significant incidental finding?

Check the box that shows how you feel

Not at all
concerned

A little
concerned

Moderately
concerned

Very
concerned

Extremely
concerned

Discuss this
answer with
your provider



4. How concerned are you about the risk of radiation exposure?

Check the box that shows how you feel

Not at all
concerned

A little
concerned

Moderately
concerned

Very
concerned

Extremely
concerned

Discuss this
answer with
your provider



5. How concerned are you about the risk of overdiagnosis?

Check the box that shows how you feel

Not at all
concerned

A little
concerned

Moderately
concerned

Very
concerned

Extremely
concerned

Discuss this
answer with
your provider



6. How concerned are you about the need to travel for lung cancer screening?

Check the box that shows how you feel

Not at all
concerned

A little
concerned

Moderately
concerned

Very
concerned

Extremely
concerned

Discuss this
answer with
your provider



7. How concerned are you about the time it takes to have lung cancer screening?

Check the box that shows how you feel

Not at all
concerned

A little
concerned

Moderately
concerned

Very
concerned

Extremely
concerned

Discuss this
answer with
your provider



7. How concerned are you about the stress and anxiety that lung cancer screening may cause for you and your family?

Check the box that shows how you feel

Not at all
concerned

A little
concerned

Moderately
concerned

Very
concerned

Extremely
concerned

Discuss this
answer with
your provider



General Attitudes and Beliefs about Cancer Screening

- The next few pages will ask you to share your attitudes and beliefs about cancer screening.
- Print these pages and check the boxes that show how you feel.
- You can then share these pages with your health care provider when you discuss whether lung cancer screening is right for you.

1. Is there any chance that screening will save my life, I want to do it.

Check the box that shows how you feel

Strongly
Disagree

Disagree

Neither
Agree or
Disagree

Agree

Strongly
Agree



Discuss this
answer with
your provider

2. I want to carefully weigh the benefits and harms of a cancer screening test before deciding whether to have the test

Check the box that shows how you feel

Strongly
Disagree

Disagree

Neither
Agree or
Disagree

Agree

Strongly
Agree

Discuss this
answer with
your provider



2. I want to carefully weigh the benefits and harms of a cancer screening test before deciding whether to have the test

Check the box that shows how you feel

Strongly
Disagree

Disagree

Neither
Agree or
Disagree

Agree

Strongly
Agree

Discuss this
Answer with
Your Provider



3. Getting more information about my body from a cancer screening test is always good

Check the box that shows how you feel

Strongly
Disagree

Disagree

Neither
Agree or
Disagree

Agree

Strongly
Agree

Discuss this
answer with
your provider



4. I prefer not to know if I have cancer

Check the box that shows how you feel

Strongly
Disagree

Disagree

Neither
Agree or
Disagree

Agree

Strongly
Agree

Discuss this
answer with
your provider



5. Having a cancer screening test makes me feel like I am doing the right thing

Check the box that shows how you feel

Strongly
Disagree

Disagree

Neither
Agree or
Disagree

Agree

Strongly
Agree



Discuss this
answer with
your provider

6. Having a cancer screening test every year will cause me to worry

Check the box that shows how you feel

Strongly
Disagree

Disagree

Neither
Agree or
Disagree

Agree

Strongly
Agree

Discuss this
answer with
your provider



7. Medical tests (such as repeat x-rays) are not a big deal for me.

Check the box that shows how you feel

Strongly
Disagree

Disagree

Neither
Agree or
Disagree

Agree

Strongly
Agree

Discuss this
answer with
your provider



8. I do not want any additional medical tests done unless it is absolutely necessary

Check the box that shows how you feel

Strongly
Disagree

Disagree

Neither
Agree or
Disagree

Agree

Strongly
Agree

Discuss this
answer with
your provider



Special Issues for Veterans-Help with Smoking Cessation

Remember: The most important thing you can do to prevent lung cancer is to stop smoking.

The VA's smoking quit-line counselors can help. Call them at **1-855-QUIT-VET (1-855-784-8838)**

It is never too late to benefit from quitting smoking. Your risk of lung cancer begins to go down as soon as you stop smoking. After 10 years without smoking your lung cancer risk will decrease by 50%.

Place a check next in the box below if you want to speak with your primary care doctor about helping you to quit smoking.

Help with Smoking Cessation Discuss Discuss

☐

Discuss this
decision with
your provider




Mental Health and Lung Cancer Screening

We know it can be hard for Veterans who have anxiety, depression, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to quit smoking or to start lung cancer screening.

Place a check in the box below would like to speak with a behavioral health provider about smoking cessation.

Help from a Behavioral Health Provider

☐


Discuss this
decision with
your provider

Your Decision and Questions for your Doctor

Considering both the benefits and potential harms, would you like to proceed to have Lung Cancer Screening? Check the box below

| | | |
|----|----------|-----|
| No | Not Sure | Yes |
|----|----------|-----|

Enter questions for your doctor in the space below.



Share this page
with your
provider

You have now completed the Lung Cancer Screening Decision Tool!

Please print this tool and share with your health care provider.

These pages can help you and your provider to decide whether lung cancer screening is the right decision for you.

Thank you for using the Lung Cancer Screening Decision Tool!