



Small Lung Nodules: *What You Need to Know*

Why have I been given this handout?

One or more small lung nodules were seen on your low-dose chest Computed Tomography scan (LDCT) that was done as a screening test for lung cancer.

What is a lung nodule?

Commonly called a “spot on the lung,” a nodule is a round area that is more solid than normal lung tissue. It shows up as a white spot on a LDCT scan. Lung nodules are usually caused by scar tissue, a healed infection that never made you sick, or some irritant found in the air you breathe.

It may help you to know that nodules are detected in up to half of patients who undergo LDCT imaging. In these patients, very few pulmonary nodules turn out to be cancer.

What is considered a *small* lung nodule?

A nodule is generally considered small if it is less than 9 mm in diameter.



Should I worry that I have a small nodule?

Usually a small nodule (less than 9 mm) is not a cancer, but it still could be an early cancer. The best ways to tell if a small nodule is possibly cancer are by:

1. Seeing how it looks on the LDCT scan, and
2. Seeing whether it grows over time.

How likely is the nodule an early lung cancer?

Most small nodules **are not** early lung cancer. Fewer than 5 percent of small nodules, or 5 out of 100, turn out to be cancer.

Did you just say “lung cancer”?

Hearing the words “lung cancer” can be distressing. It is normal to be worried and anxious when there is even a small chance you might have lung cancer. Please talk with your health care team about any worries or concerns that you have.

What will happen next?

Your provider will probably recommend getting more LDCT scans to keep a close eye on the small nodule to see if it changes. We call this “active surveillance.”

- Most non-cancer nodules won’t grow, so seeing that they don’t get bigger after repeat LDCT scans over several months is reassuring.
- On the other hand, if the nodule is getting bigger, it should be looked at more closely to see if it is lung cancer. Nodules can be viewed more closely using different radiology studies or by biopsy. Your health care team will determine which is best for you.

Why shouldn’t I get a biopsy now to make sure the nodule isn’t cancer?

- A biopsy means removing a small piece of your lung in order to look at it under a microscope. Biopsies are usually not recommended when nodules are small because it is very difficult to biopsy them safely. Doing a biopsy when a nodule is small can cause harm such as trouble breathing, bleeding, or infection.
- Biopsies are often done for nodules that are 9 mm or larger.

Is it really safe to wait for the next LDCT scan?

Most cancers grow fairly slowly; it takes several months for them to get bigger. So even if the nodule is lung cancer, it will likely still be small in a few months. Also, even if the nodule is lung cancer that is growing, there is a very good chance that surgery will cure you. Your provider will determine the best time for your next LDCT scan. Your provider may choose to discuss the LDCT results with other specialists to determine the best plan for you.

Write the date of your next LDCT scan here:

Call your coordinator at _____ if you haven't had the scan by then.

If you have been treated for pneumonia within 3 months of your scheduled scan, please notify your coordinator. It may be necessary to change the date of your LDCT.

Can all these LDCT scans be dangerous?

LDCT scans use radiation to take pictures of the body. Though radiation in high doses can cause cancer, the chance that a few LDCT scans will cause cancer is extremely low, especially because LDCT scans are used for screening and follow-up.

What if my nodule is lung cancer?

Even if a small nodule turns out to be lung cancer, it is likely to be an early stage lung cancer. People with early stage lung cancer that is treated are less likely to die of lung cancer than people who are diagnosed at a later stage when the cancer has started to cause symptoms. VA provides high-quality care for patients who have lung cancer, and if you develop lung cancer, we will be with you every step of the way. Please discuss any concerns you have about lung cancer with your health care team.



REMEMBER: The best way to prevent lung cancer is to **STOP SMOKING**. If you are still smoking, talk with your VA health care team and call 1-855-QUIT VET (1-855-784-8838). WE CAN HELP!

What if I'm still smoking?

We are here to help you quit! Quitting now will decrease your chance of getting lung cancer, as well as many other serious health problems like emphysema and heart disease. Your provider will help you quit by prescribing medicines and offering counseling. Call 1-855-QUIT VET (1-855-784-8838) for individualized counseling and follow-up calls from trained counselors in English or Spanish to help you quit.

When should I contact my provider?

Contact your clinician if you:

- Have a change or increase in cough, or cough up blood
- Develop shortness of breath, chest pain, fevers, or chills
- Experience unintended weight loss of 10 pounds or more
- Have worry and anxiety
- Want more information

What are my "take away" messages?

- Most small nodules are not lung cancer.
- Most patients with small nodules will need additional LDCT scans during the next year.
- Biopsies of small nodules can cause more harm than good.
- If you are still smoking, quitting is the most important thing you can do to improve your health.
- It is normal to be worried when there is even a small chance of lung cancer.
- Please share any concerns you have with your health care team.

For more information, please contact your local VA Medical Center or Health Clinic.