Taking Control of Your Health

Lung Cancer Screening & Quitting Smoking
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Your Decision to Get Screened

Congratulations on your decision to have a low-dose CT scan (sometimes called a CAT scan) for lung cancer! As you probably know, lung cancer and heart disease are the major killers of tobacco smokers. The lung scan is designed to detect lung cancer at an early stage, while it can still be treated. Of course, it usually cannot detect heart disease or the many other types of cancer caused by smoking. Yet, finding lung cancer early is a big deal—it can save your life.

The fact you decided to get a lung scan means that you care about your health. You may even be worried about your health. It means that you want to catch problems early. It means that you take action to protect your health. Good for you!

Choosing to get a lung scan also means that you might be thinking about how your behaviors, like smoking, have affected your health. You probably want to know how your lungs are doing. Has smoking harmed them? What is your risk of developing problems? You may even know people who have had lung diseases caused by smoking. You may worry if you will end up the same way. The decision to get a screening means that you have taken an important step to take care of your health. You want to know what is happening in your own body. Through this process, you might have spent some time thinking about your smoking.

Write down some of your own reasons for getting a lung scan now:

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Making the decision to get a lung scan means that you are choosing to take care of your health. Why now?

- Are you hoping to stay healthy and active as long as possible?
- Do you fear being dependent on others for your care?
- Do you want to be around for your children and grandchildren?
- Are you worried about suffering with lung cancer?

There are many good reasons for getting a lung screen. For the same reasons, this is also the perfect time to reconsider your smoking.

The screening process might have you feeling nervous or anxious, and you may feel like you can’t think about quitting smoking on top of that. You also may feel guilty about your smoking, which may upset you. You might have felt this way in the past when you or others close to you have had medical procedures. The difference today is you are in a situation where you can use these feelings in a positive way to motivate you to make a healthy change in your life. Getting screened is a step in the right direction to a healthier lifestyle, but it is not a substitute for quitting smoking. Make this a turning point in your life by quitting smoking too!
Your lung scan is a perfect opportunity to consider quitting smoking. Quitting smoking is a good idea no matter where you are in life. There are major, immediate benefits for your health, your lifestyle, and others around you. The sooner you quit, the sooner you will notice the benefits. Your lungs begin to repair themselves right away, making it easier to breathe and do other activities. Quitting smoking is the best way to reduce your risk for lung cancer (and many other diseases). Ex-smokers enjoy a higher quality of life. They have fewer illnesses like colds and the flu. They have lower rates of bronchitis and pneumonia. And they feel healthier and happier than people who still smoke. Quitting smoking is the most important decision that you can make for your health. It will probably add years—and better years—to your life.

Right now, you may feel like you are not only at a turning point in your health, but in other areas of your life as well. Maybe you’ve retired or changed jobs, have young grandchildren, or hold a new role in your family with new responsibilities. Quitting smoking can help you take on these new changes with better health and a new mindset. For example, think of how much more time you can spend with your family when you don’t have to step away for a smoke break! Plus, your family and friends have probably been concerned about your smoking. They will be excited to hear that you’ve made a positive change by quitting. You’ll also have more time and money to spend on activities and hobbies. In addition to paying for cigarettes, smokers end up paying more for health care because they get sick more often. The best way to reduce these costs is to quit smoking. First, let’s take a step back and think about why you are still smoking.

Jerry was just three months away from retirement. He was excited to begin this new phase in his life. He was looking forward to having the freedom and time to pursue his hobbies—woodworking and fly fishing. As retirement got closer, Jerry spent more time reflecting on his life and his future. He realized that his new freedom could be even better if he were free from the one thing that was controlling him—his cigarettes. Jerry made the decision to quit smoking. With this decision made, he was able to sit back and envision how much better his retirement would look without the burden of cigarettes.

No matter what the results of your lung scan show, quitting smoking right now is one of the best decisions you can make for your health and your life.
Waiting for Your Scan Results

Is there anything more nerve-wracking than waiting for the results of an important medical test? Are you reading this while still waiting to hear the results of your lung scan? If so, you are probably feeling at least a little bit nervous and worried. You may be imagining how your life might change if you learn that your results are abnormal. Will your future include biopsies, surgery, chemotherapy?

Some people use this waiting period to make promises to themselves or their God.

In the next two chapters, we discuss the possibility of receiving either abnormal or normal results from your lung scan. Please don’t wait for your results before reading these chapters. Read both chapters now.

These thoughts and feelings are natural. Fear has a way of getting our attention. It warns us of danger so that we can act to reduce the danger. Worrying about cancer is a message to take action. You already took action by getting a lung scan to catch cancer early. What other important action can you take? You can quit smoking. No matter what your test results turn out to be, quitting smoking reduces the danger of cancer and other serious health problems.

Once you get your test results, other emotions will take over. If the results are normal, you will probably feel great relief. Some people respond to that relief by putting the danger of smoking out of their mind. Other people realize that they “dodged a bullet” and take advantage of the good news to take action. They quit smoking.

If your results are abnormal, you may be consumed with worry and overwhelmed with planning for additional tests or treatment. Again, quitting smoking may move to the back burner.

For these reasons, it is best not to wait for your test results. NOW is the best time to commit to quitting smoking. As we will discuss in the next sections, quitting smoking will be important whether you receive normal or abnormal scan results. So why wait? Take control now!

**MYTH**
“A normal result means that smoking hasn’t harmed me.”

**FACT**
Continuing to smoke may still harm you. A Lung CT scan won’t show other diseases that may be present or in the early stages such as other cancers, diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, COPD, rheumatoid arthritis, macular degeneration, and gum disease.

Judith prayed, “If I don’t have cancer, I promise that I will take better care of myself from this point forward. I’ll do anything! I’ll finally quit smoking. I really mean it this time.”

David had a lung cancer screening test yesterday. He felt good about making the decision to be more informed about his health. Now he felt the result was out of his hands. That was until his wife reminded him that he could take one important step that would improve his health regardless of the scan results. That step was to quit smoking. David thought a lot about what his wife said and—although he didn’t want to admit it—she was right. David realized that whether he got good or bad news, by making the decision to quit smoking he could improve his life.

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If Your Results Are Abnormal

You may hear that your lung scan results show an abnormality. This can mean many different things. For example, your doctor might tell you that there was a suspicious spot that needs to be watched carefully over the next several months or years. Or you may hear that there was evidence of lung cancer, and that further testing or treatment is needed.

Even after an abnormal test result, it’s important to keep in mind one fact. No matter how old you are or how long you’ve smoked, quitting is good for you. Quitting smoking can help you recover from illness faster and live longer. Cancer treatments, such as chemotherapy and radiation therapy work much better for patients who don’t smoke. Also, if you end up having surgery, quitting smoking will help your wounds heal quicker.

Patients who quit smoking are less likely to develop or worsen:

- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- COPD
- Emphysema
- Heart disease

In addition to all of these health benefits, your overall quality of life will be better without smoking. For example, you will be able to be around non-smokers and children for longer periods of time. You will have better smell and taste. You will have more time and energy to do the things you love.

Your doctor and your loved ones will be proud of you when they hear that you decided to quit smoking! Even though you may be feeling down about the results of your scan, quitting smoking is a positive step. And it is a way that you can still control your health. The benefits you experience will be almost immediate and will continue into your future.

Now is the time! Take advantage of this negative experience and change it into a positive moment for quitting smoking.

Like Edelyn, you may be feeling anxious, worried, and scared about what your results mean or what your future will be like. You may feel like your health and your life is no longer in your control. But, in fact, you can still take control.

Some people think that when they are diagnosed with cancer, there is no further reason to quit smoking. That it is too late. This is not at all true. It is never too late to quit smoking. You may be feeling anxious about what your results mean or what your future holds. Yet, quitting smoking is one thing that you can do to take control in your life and move your health in a positive direction.

Edelyn couldn’t stop imagining how she would react if she heard those words from her doctor: “You have lung cancer.” She thought about how she would tell her family. Her mother, husband, and children had all warned her and tried to get her to quit. This would mean that they were right, and that she had let them down. She wondered how she would cope with cancer treatment, and if she would be able to continue working and taking care of her family.

Growing up, it seemed like everyone in John’s life smoked. His family, friends, teachers, and even his doctor, smoked. He couldn’t imagine his life without smoking. He was about to retire and he just became a grandfather for the second time. At a recent doctor’s visit, John’s doctor recommended that he get a lung scan, so he did. A few days later, John received a phone call and was told the scan showed an abnormal nodule that needed further testing. The first thing he did was light up a cigarette to cope with the news. As he was smoking, John thought, “This can’t be helping anything.” He knew he wanted to enjoy his grandchildren and retirement with good health. John decided this was going to be his last cigarette.

MYTH

“If cancer is found, there is no point in quitting smoking.”

FACT

Even after cancer is found, quitting smoking will lower the risk of other cancers, and improve your odds of survival and recovery. Quitting smoking now will improve the results from surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy. Plus, you will be less likely to have side effects like heart problems, fatigue, and infections. It definitely is never too late to quit.
If Your Results Are Normal

You may be relieved if you receive the news that the doctors did not find any problems on your lung scan at this time. In other words, despite a long history of smoking, you may have “dodged a bullet” up to this point in your life. Before moving on, let’s take a moment to consider some examples of dodging a bullet.

1. Debbie was pulled over for drunk driving. At her trial, the arresting officer failed to show up to testify, so the judge dismissed the case. Debbie’s attorney turned to her and said, “Wow, Debbie, you were facing jail time. You really dodged a bullet.” That night, Debbie got drunk with her friends and got back behind the wheel.

2. Manny has been living with coronary heart disease for the past 7 years. He takes his medication to relieve his angina, but he struggles to eat a healthy diet. One night, Manny and his friends went to a local sports bar to watch the baseball game. While enjoying some wings and beer, Manny began to have intense pain in his chest, his third angina attack in as many days. Manny took his nitrate pill and began to feel better. His friends were concerned and Manny said, “No worries, my pills work like magic. My doctor said the angina is like a warning that a heart attack may come. I just dodged another bullet!” Manny then ordered another basket of wings and pitcher of beer for the group.

3. Gary has smoked cigarettes for 42 years. His doctor told him that his smoking put him at high risk for lung cancer, and he should begin to have annual lung scans. Reluctantly, he made an appointment and had the scan. When his doctor called during dinner to tell him the results, he held his breath, prepared to hear the worst. He felt his heart pound until his doctor said, “Good news—no sign of cancer this year, but you should be retested next year. So far, you’ve dodged a bullet.” Gary felt a wave of relief, lit a cigarette, and went back to his dinner.

MYTH
“DODGING A BULLET”

MYTH
“A normal result means that at least I won’t get lung cancer.”

FACT
A normal result means that you probably do not have lung cancer now. However, a lung CT scan cannot detect the signs of lung cancer that could be occurring in your DNA or in your cells. This is why you should repeat the scan next year. If you continue to smoke, you continue to increase your risk of developing lung cancer.

FACT
A normal result means that you probably do not have lung cancer now. However, a lung CT scan cannot detect the signs of lung cancer that could be occurring in your DNA or in your cells. This is why you should repeat the scan next year. If you continue to smoke, you continue to increase your risk of developing lung cancer.
As you read the first two stories, you probably thought that the people were acting illogical, foolish, or even stupid. They all had just been very lucky. Yet they quickly returned to behavior that put them right back at great risk. You may have wondered, “What were they thinking?”

Did you have the same reaction to the last story? When you think about it, it really wasn’t much different from the earlier stories. And yet, Gary’s response to a good lung scan result is how some smokers react. They see the result as permission to continue smoking. It shows how easily we can fool ourselves and make excuses for dangerous behavior. But it is pretty easy to see that this type of thinking is illogical. See how many reasons you can list for why Gary’s thinking is illogical:

How many reasons did you come up with?
Were they any of these?

1. He may have been cancer-free this year, but if he continues to smoke, Gary’s risk of lung cancer will be greater next year.
2. Gary may not have lung cancer, but smoking also causes at least a dozen other cancers, including cancer of the mouth, nose, sinuses, lip, voice box, throat, esophagus, bladder, liver, kidney, pancreas, ovary, cervix, stomach, colon, rectum, and blood. By continuing to smoke, he remains at risk for many of these.
3. The scan is not perfect. It may have missed a cancer tumor that was too small to detect this year. If so, smoking will make things worse.
4. Smoking kills in many ways besides cancer. Heart attacks, stroke, and emphysema lead the long list.
5. Getting a lung scan shows that Gary is concerned about his health. This would have been a perfect opportunity to take a healthy turn by quitting smoking.

This chart shows you how much quitting smoking reduces your chance of dying from two major smoking-related illnesses, compared to current smokers. For example, if you quit smoking for 5 or more years, you reduce your risk of dying from coronary heart disease by 60%. That’s almost as if you never smoked! And quitting smoking cuts your risk of lung cancer almost in half.
Finally, not only will you likely gain years of healthier life by quitting smoking now, you will probably have a happier life as well.

After quitting, you can expect:
- Your clothes, hair, skin, car and home will smell better.
- Stains on your teeth and nails will fade.
- Sense of taste and smell will return to normal.
- Your skin quality will improve.
- You’ll be able to exercise or climb stairs with less shortness of breath.
- You’ll save money.
- You’re health insurance costs may go down.
- You’ll snore less.
- You won’t have to sneak away from your workplace, restaurants, and friends to get a smoke break.
- You’ll be setting an example for your children and grandchildren.

We hope that your lung scan results will be normal. If you dodge that bullet, how will you respond?

☐ "I guess smoking isn’t harming me, so I’ll just continue to smoke."
☐ "I got lucky this time. It’s time to take control of my health and quit smoking."

Quit Smoking – You Can Do It!

You have probably been a smoker for a long time. Because of this, quitting smoking will be challenging, but you can do it. Well over half of all smokers have been able to quit. And you now have important reasons for quitting!

Lorenzo has been smoking as long as he can remember. He had a pack of cigarettes with him through every major event in his life. His first job. Buying a house. Marriage. Fatherhood. Retirement. Becoming a grandfather. Lorenzo remembers when you could smoke anywhere—even at the movies and on a plane. But times have really changed! His children and grandchildren hate that he smokes. He’s tired of feeling like a social outcast. And he’s finding it harder and harder to come up with the money to pay for cigarettes. Lorenzo wants to be around for a while, so he made two key life decisions: (1) get a lung cancer scan, and (2) quit smoking.

At this point, you’ve been smoking so much of your life that maybe you can’t imagine being without cigarettes. It might be hard to think about quitting when you’ve been smoking for so long. However, at this point in your life, you also have a lot of reasons to stay as healthy as possible. Quitting smoking will give you the freedom to get the most from your life from this point forward. Quitting smoking is something that you can be proud of. And people who care about you will be proud of you as well.

Richard is 66 years old. "I started smoking when I was 13. In those days, smoking was a normal activity. In fact, I remember my dad giving me my first taste of a cigarette. Since then, smoking has been a constant part of my life. But all of this changed when my doc told me to get screened for lung cancer. That really got me thinking. I worried about making Carol, my wife, a widow. I didn’t want to lose time with my new grandson, Eric. Even though I always knew that smoking was bad for me, this made it real. So I quit. Now I’m enjoying retirement with Carol. We just had our 43rd anniversary. We get to enjoy watching Eric grow up, and I have the energy to play with him. Now I wish that I had quit smoking sooner. But better late than never!"
Today, smokers have many tools available to help them quit. The most difficult part of quitting is usually the first few days. That’s when you need to get through nicotine withdrawal symptoms. These may include strong cravings to smoke. Fortunately, there are now several choices of safe, effective medications that make this period much easier. Many of these can be purchased at your local drug store without a prescription. These include nicotine patch, gum, and lozenge. Other products require a doctor’s prescription. These include bupropion (Zyban®) and varenicline (Chantix®). Both of these are pills that make it easier to quit smoking. Talk to your doctor about your options.

What about electronic cigarettes? You may have seen advertisements for e-cigarettes or heard about people using them to quit smoking. Maybe you have even tried them yourself. At this point, there is not much research on electronic cigarettes. We don’t know how well they work for quitting smoking. We also do not yet know how safe they are. Therefore, it’s best to first try the approved quit-smoking medications.

Information, counseling, and support can also help you quit smoking. You may call your state’s tobacco quitline, or call the national number to be connected directly to your state’s quitline.

Over 50 million Americans have already quit smoking. You can be next!

Beverly returned home from her lung screening appointment and made a decision. Earlier, while in the waiting room, she realized how silly it was to continue smoking while she worried about lung cancer. The two things just didn’t go together. So, back at home she immediately found her two remaining packs of cigarettes and threw them away. Next into the trash went her 3 lighters and the ashtrays from her back porch. She went to the drug store and bought a supply of nicotine patches. The next few days were difficult at times, but not terrible. Now, she is looking down at the envelope that contains her lung scan results. As she tears it open, she knows that whether the news is good or bad, she has already taken the first step to controlling her health by quitting smoking for good.

MYTH vs. FACT

**MYTH**
“I can’t quit. I’ve tried many times.”

**FACT**
Millions of people quit smoking and YOU CAN TOO! In fact, there are more former smokers than current smokers. Most smokers attempt to quit many times before they are finally able to quit for good. Each time you learn something new. And you may need to try a different quit smoking medication. Don’t give up—you can quit!

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The Most Important Messages

1. Getting a lung scan was a good decision. It means that you are taking control of your health.

2. While you are waiting for the results of your lung scan, take the next step of controlling your health by quitting smoking.

3. Regardless of the results of your scan, quitting smoking will improve your health.

4. Even if you are diagnosed with cancer, quitting smoking will improve your chances of beating it. Cancer treatments work better if you don’t smoke.

5. If your lung scan came back normal, you have been given a second chance. Take advantage of this opportunity by quitting smoking.

6. Although quitting smoking is challenging, you can do it! Over half of all smokers have already quit.

7. There are tools available today to make quitting smoking less difficult than in the past. These include several medications that reduce nicotine withdrawal and cravings to smoke. Talk to your doctor, or you can call the state quitline at 1-800-QUIT-NOW.

8. E-cigarettes have not been approved for quitting smoking because we do not yet know how safe they are or how well they work. It is better to use an approved medication first.

Let’s take a look at what happens when you throw away your last cigarette\(^1\).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time After Quitting</th>
<th>Benefit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20 Minutes After Your Last Cigarette</td>
<td>Most of the nicotine has left your brain. Your blood pressure and pulse rate go back to normal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Hours After Your Last Cigarette</td>
<td>The level of carbon monoxide in your blood has decreased to normal. The level of oxygen rises to normal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Hours After Your Last Cigarette</td>
<td>Your risk of having a heart attack begins to go down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Days After Quitting</td>
<td>You can taste and smell things better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Weeks After Quitting</td>
<td>Your lungs are working better. You have better blood circulation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Month After Quitting</td>
<td>You cough less and have less shortness of breath. You breathe better and are not as tired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Year After Quitting</td>
<td>Your risk of heart disease has been cut in half.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Years After Quitting</td>
<td>Your risk of dying of lung cancer has been cut in half.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-15 Years After Quitting</td>
<td>Your risk of stroke is the same as someone who never smoked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Years After Quitting</td>
<td>Your risk of lung cancer is nearly the same as someone who never smoked. Your risk of pancreatic cancer has also been reduced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Years After Quitting</td>
<td>Your risk of heart disease is as low as if you never smoked.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) Source: American Cancer Society; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
“A journey of a thousand miles begins with a simple step.”

- Confucius
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