



# Interstitial lung abnormalities

## What are interstitial lung abnormalities (ILAs)?

ILAs are not a disease. The term ILA refers to minor changes on a CT scan of your lungs that may indicate inflammation or scarring. They are typically not associated with any symptoms. If you have an ILA on your CT scan, it is important to discuss this with your treating doctor as it may be an early sign that you are at risk of developing an **interstitial lung disease**.



### What is interstitial lung disease – also known as ILD?

ILD is the clinical umbrella term for a broad group of similar lung diseases that are generally caused by inflammation and fibrosis. Pulmonary fibrosis refers to ILDs that involve scarring of the lung tissue.

## How many people have ILAs?

ILAs are relatively common.

**An estimated 8% of people who participate in lung cancer screening will have ILAs detected.**

## Who is more likely to develop ILAs?

There are several risk factors that may mean you are more likely to develop an ILA:

- If you or someone in your family has pulmonary fibrosis
- If you have an auto-immune condition, such as rheumatoid arthritis
- If you currently smoke or have previously smoked
- If you have been exposed to certain substances that irritate the lungs such as dusts or fumes.

## What happens after ILAs are found?

If ILAs are found on a CT scan, you may need to have some further tests so your treating doctor knows how best to manage them. The diagram below shows what is involved when an ILA is detected.

### ILA found on a CT scan

#### To see how your lungs are affected, your treating doctor will:

- check for symptoms like cough or shortness of breath
- arrange lung-function (breathing) tests
- discuss any risk factors for ILD such as family history or connective tissue disease.

#### Lower risk of progressing to ILD

- Continue regular monitoring of symptoms, and monitoring with CT scans and lung-function tests if appropriate.

#### Higher risk of progressing to ILD

- Referral to a respiratory specialist for further assessment.
- Continue regular monitoring of symptoms, and monitoring with CT scans and lung-function tests.

## Do people go on to develop ILD after ILAs are found?

An ILA may be an early sign of an ILD developing, which is why it is important to monitor your lungs and your health for any changes. Not everyone who has an ILA will go on to develop ILD. On average, 1 out of 10 people with an ILA progress to ILD every year.

The likelihood of progressing to ILD depends on a few different factors (e.g. family history, smoking and other exposures, as well as findings on your CT scans). Based on these, your treating doctor will discuss your individual risk.

## What can you do to reduce the risk of progression to ILD?

In addition to working with your healthcare team, there are other ways to help reduce the risk of ILAs from progressing:

- Look after your lungs.
  - Stop smoking or vaping. It's never too late to stop smoking or vaping, so make sure you speak with your healthcare team about the best way to quit.
  - Avoid exposure to second-hand smoke.
  - If you are exposed to hazardous agents while you are at work or from a hobby, you should speak with your treating doctor about how best to protect your lungs.
  - Be aware of air quality. If there are high levels of pollution in the air or smoke from fires, try to stay indoors with your doors and windows closed

- Avoid getting infections. Make sure you wash your hands regularly and avoid seeing people who are sick with an infection.
- Ensure that you stick to the monitoring schedule your healthcare team have specified. This will help to make sure that any ILDs that develop will be detected and treated early.
- Stay up to date with your vaccinations.

### Be aware of early signs of progression

Your healthcare team will continue to monitor your ILAs, but it is also important you are aware of symptoms that may suggest your ILAs are progressing. Early signs can include:



**Feeling out of breath**



**A cough that won't go away**

If you notice these symptoms, make sure you speak to your healthcare team.

**ILAs are not a disease, but they may be an early sign of a developing ILD. That's why it is so important that you and your healthcare team put together a plan to best manage your ILAs and make sure you detect any changes as early as possible. Early identification of ILD can help improve your outcomes.**



## FURTHER INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

Contact Lung Foundation Australia for more information, to access our support services and join our mailing list for regular updates and latest news.

### Lung Foundation Australia Services

- Lung Health Helpline
- Lung disease information resources
- Education webinars
- Support groups and peer-to-peer connections
- Referral to pulmonary rehabilitation
- E-newsletter

### External Links

- Centre of Research Excellence in Pulmonary Fibrosis: [cre-pf.org.au](http://cre-pf.org.au)

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