

Your pathway through lung cancer care

Everyone's journey with lung cancer begins differently. Some people have symptoms that lead to tests. Others may not have symptoms, but something is found while checking another health problem. Some people find out through the National Lung Cancer Screening Program with their GP. No matter how it starts, the next steps usually follow a clear path to help you get the best possible care.





1 Referral to a specialist

Your specialist will be an expert in lung cancer. Your GP will work with you to find the right specialist for you. They will often be a respiratory physician, although they may be other types of specialist doctor too.

2 Diagnosis and staging

Your specialist team may do more tests to:

- Check you have lung cancer
- Find out what type of lung cancer it is
- See how big your cancer is and if it has spread
- Help choose the best treatment for you.

3 Treatment planning with a multidisciplinary team (MDT)

An MDT is a group of healthcare workers with different skills. They work together to plan the best treatment for you. They will then talk with you about:

- your test results
- your treatment choices
- what each treatment is meant to do
- what matters most to you.

4 Treatment and monitoring

Your specialist team will be with you throughout treatment. They will talk with you about your treatment choices and how you feel during treatment.



Find out more about lung cancer and its management including treatment options

Surgery:
an operation to remove the cancer

Radiation therapy:
high-power X-rays to kill cancer cells or slow their growth

Immunotherapy:
helps your immune system fight cancer

Chemotherapy:
medicine to kill cancer cells

Targeted therapy:
medicine that targets genes/proteins in cancer cells

Palliative care:
improves quality of life by helping manage symptoms at any stage of care

Clinical trials:
new treatments that are being tested

5 Follow up and living with lung cancer

Your specialist team will talk about your best next steps based on how you responded to treatment. Everyone responds differently, and not everyone will be cured. So, it's important to discuss your goals to help you live your best possible life with lung cancer.

Lung Foundation Australia can help:



Speak to a Lung Cancer Specialist Nurse. A free service run by highly experienced oncology nurses who can provide evidence-based information regarding diagnosis, treatment and symptoms.



Join a peer-support group. Connect with others who share a similar lived experience either online, face-to-face or via telephone.



Need other support throughout your pathway? Such as speaking to a social worker, taking part in a pulmonary rehabilitation program or other mental health support.

Support when you need it

Being diagnosed with lung cancer can be overwhelming for you and your family. You may have questions about your diagnosis, treatment and management, or you may need emotional support to deal with living with lung cancer, and that is okay.



Week-by-week guide on what to expect throughout the lung cancer care pathway

Timeline	What to expect	Checklist/action plan
Referral to a specialist		
0-2 weeks	You should have your first specialist appointment within 2 weeks of your GP making the referral. At this appointment, the specialist will talk with you about your health, look at your scans and explain what's next.	Get an appointment from your specialist Confirm initial appointment is within 2 weeks of receiving the referral If you have not received an appointment, call the hospital or specialist clinic to ask about your referral
Diagnosis and staging		
2-4 weeks	Your specialist will organise more tests. These tests help show what kind of lung cancer you have and where it is in your body. These tests may include: - Scans: take a clear picture of your lungs (CT or PET-CT scan) - Biopsy: takes a small sample from the cancer (bronchoscopy, pleural procedure or CT-guided biopsy) - Molecular test: looks for genes/proteins in the cancer cells in your sample. You may also see a surgeon to see if surgery may help.	Diagnosis confirmed Stage of disease confirmed Molecular tests performed and results reported to you



Read about molecular tests (page 19)

Timeline	What to expect	Checklist/action plan
Treatment planning with a multidisciplinary team (MDT)		
4-6 weeks	Your case will be discussed at an MDT meeting, and your specialist will talk with you about: - What type of cancer you have and if it has spread - What treatment is recommended - The goal of treatment (to cure the cancer or help manage symptoms) - When the treatment will start - How long the treatment will last - The risks and benefits of the treatment - Possible side effects of treatment - Who to contact and what to do if you're feeling unwell after treatment. You should also talk about any support you may need before, during and after treatment. These support services can help look after your body, mind and overall wellbeing and may include:	Know your treatment options including the goals of treatment, possible outcomes and when treatment will start and how long it will last Understand the risks and benefits of your treatment Get a treatment plan with contact details for your care team and advice on when to call the hospital Discuss support services you may need and receive referrals (your nurse may give you the referrals later during your treatment)
	- Prehabilitation: support with exercise, food and emotional wellbeing to make sure that your body and mind are ready for treatment - Quitting smoking: treatments and support to help people who still smoke stop or cut down. Referrals for support to quit smoking can be arranged - Fertility support: some treatments can affect if you can have children, so talk about your options before starting treatment - Mental-health support: help with stress, worry or feeling overwhelmed - Help with breathlessness and coughing: this may be through physiotherapy, occupational therapy, exercise physiology or pulmonary rehabilitation - Palliative care: help to manage pain and other symptoms - Financial and practical planning: help with money concerns or daily-life challenges during treatment.	

Timeline	What to expect	Checklist/action plan
Treatment		
6+ weeks (treatment should start within 6 weeks, and may continue for years)	Ideally, your treatment should start within 6 weeks of your initial specialist referral. Your specialist will discuss with you any side effects that you may experience during or after treatment and how you can best manage them. Your treatment plan may change over time. Every person responds to and manages treatments differently, so your plan will change over time to best suit you	Start treatment within 6 weeks of your initial referral - This may take longer if you need more tests Understand possible side effects of treatment and how to manage them Know that your treatment plan may change - This depends on how your body responds to treatment and any side effects you have Consider making an advance care directive
	Before starting treatment, your specialist team should discuss advance care planning with you. This means recording your healthcare values and preferences so they are clearly available if you are unable to express your wishes yourself.  Learn more about managing common side effects  Find out more about advanced care planning	

Timeline	What to expect	Checklist/action plan
Follow up and living with lung cancer		
Treatment completion onwards	When your treatment ends, no matter your response, your specialist team will provide you with a treatment summary. This should include: - Your diagnosis and information about your cancer - The tests you had and the results - The treatment you received - Any side effects you had and how they were managed - Any support services you received - Possible long-term effects of treatment - Your follow-up plan including appointments and scans - Contact details for your care team. Every person responds differently to treatment, and not all people will be cured of their disease. Your care team will talk with you about: - Ongoing support and rehabilitation - Ways to help you live as best possible with lung cancer. They will also explain: - Signs and symptoms to watch for if the cancer comes back - Healthy lifestyle changes that can support your wellbeing and may lower the risk of the cancer returning.	Receive treatment summary Know what follow-up care you need and the role of each person in your care team Receive referrals for ongoing support services Know the signs and symptoms to watch for if the cancer comes back Be aware of positive lifestyle changes that can help reduce the risk of the cancer coming back Know who to contact if you have any concerns
	 Discover more about living well with lung cancer  Download a guide to creating a survivorship care plan	



This guide shows the best-possible pathway for people with lung cancer. If your pathway is different, or if you think key steps have been missed, talk with your specialist team. You can also get a second opinion if you are unsure about anything including the steps in your pathway.



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