



# Love *your* Lungs

LUNG CANCER  
SCREENING  
INFORMATION  
SHEET

This information sheet will guide you through your first screening visit and results communication.  
Please speak with your Ontario Lung Screening Program location if you have any questions or concerns.



**Ontario Health**  
Cancer Care Ontario

## Lung cancer screening for people at high risk

Cancer screening is testing done on people who are at risk of getting cancer, but who have no symptoms and generally feel fine. The lung cancer screening test is a type of computed tomography (CT) scan that uses a small amount of radiation. This test is called a low-dose CT scan.

During a low-dose CT scan, you lie on an open table that passes through a large donut-shaped machine, called a scanner. The scanner uses a small amount of radiation to take detailed pictures of your lungs. The test only takes a few minutes and is not painful. There are no medications or needles given during the test.

## Why you should screen for lung cancer

People who are 55 to 80 years old and have smoked cigarettes every day for at least 20 years may be at high risk of getting lung cancer and may benefit from getting screened.

Regular screening is important because it can find lung cancer early, when treatment has a better chance of working.

## Why you qualify for lung cancer screening – your risk score

You qualify to participate in lung cancer screening based on your risk score. Ontario Lung Screening Program (OLSP) staff figured out your risk score after you answered questions about your smoking and health history.

This risk score tells you your chance of getting lung cancer in the next 6 years. For example, if your risk score is 10, your chance of getting lung cancer in the next 6 years is 10 per cent. People with a two per cent or greater risk of developing lung cancer over the next six years are eligible to participate in the OLSP.

## Low-dose CT results

- The low-dose CT scan looks for lung nodules, which are spots on someone's lungs, but cannot tell whether they are actually cancer. Having a lung nodule does not necessarily mean that you have lung cancer, but it does mean that more testing is needed.
- The doctor who looks at your low-dose CT scan will give it a score based on the size of possible nodules and what they look like. The doctor will use the score to figure out what your next step should be. You can see what the scan scores mean and next steps in the table below.
- OLSP staff will call you with your result (scan score) within 2 weeks of your scan date.
- Your low-dose CT scan also takes pictures of body parts near your lungs, such as your heart, bones, kidneys, liver and thyroid. If your low-dose CT scan shows something unusual in these other body parts, your results will be sent to your doctor or nurse practitioner. Your doctor or nurse practitioner will decide whether you need more tests based on these other results.

## Your results

### If your next step is another low-dose CT scan:

It is important to come back for your next scheduled scan. Screening works best if you get checked regularly.

### If your next step is being sent for more testing:

You need more tests to find out whether you have lung cancer. You will be contacted by a member of the lung diagnostic assessment team to talk about your next steps.

Being sent for more tests does not necessarily mean you have lung cancer. But if you do have lung cancer, the lung diagnostic assessment team will talk to you about your treatment options and help you decide what is best for you.



Scan score	What it means	Next step
0	Your scan showed a possible infection or inflammation that needs follow-up.	Your next scan will be within the next 1 to 3 months.
1	Your scan did not show any nodules that need follow-up.	Your next scan will be in about 12 months.
2	Your scan showed 1 or more nodules with a <b>very low</b> chance of being or becoming cancer.	Your next scan will be in about 12 months.
3	Your scan showed 1 or more nodules with a <b>low</b> chance of being or becoming cancer.	Your next scan will be in about 6 months to check whether any nodules have changed.
4A	Your scan showed 1 or more nodules that <b>might</b> have a chance of being or becoming cancer.	Your next scan will be in about 3 months to check whether any nodules have changed.
4B	Your scan showed 1 or more nodules that need more testing.	You will be sent for more testing.
4X	Your scan showed 1 or more nodules that need more testing.	You will be sent for more testing.

*“In the past, there wasn’t a lot that could be done to cure a person with lung cancer because it was often found at a later stage. Now there is a test to find lung cancer early when treatment has a better chance of working.”*

Dr. Gail Darling, Leading Lung Surgeon







## Potential benefits and potential harms of lung cancer screening

While screening can help find lung cancer early, screening tests are not perfect and can have potential harms. Because you are at high risk of getting lung cancer, the potential benefits of finding cancer early are probably greater than the potential harms of screening. When making a decision to screen, it is important to think about the potential benefits and potential harms and your own values and preferences – or what matters most to you.

### Potential benefits:

- Getting screened regularly with a low-dose CT scan can find lung cancer earlier which may mean that:
  - The chance of dying from lung cancer is lower
  - Treatment may have a better chance of working
  - Fewer treatments may be required and the treatments may be less invasive (easier to handle)
- Screening can be part of taking an active role in protecting your health and can be reassuring for some people.

### Potential harms:

- Low-dose CT scans may cause false positives. Some low-dose CT scans will show a nodule that needs more testing. Usually this follow-up test is another low-dose CT scan. Most people who have more tests will not have cancer.
- Lung cancer screening may find a cancer that is growing very slowly and would never make you sick or cause you any harm. Unfortunately, it is usually not possible to tell which cancers are more harmful.

- Low-dose CT scans use a small amount of radiation. Although the amount of radiation is low, there is a small chance that the extra radiation from many low-dose CT scans over time could cause cancer. For people who are at high risk of getting lung cancer, the potential benefits of finding cancer early are probably greater than the potential harms of the small amount of radiation from the test.
  - The amount of radiation you get through a low-dose CT scan for lung cancer screening is a lot more than a chest X-ray, much less than a regular chest CT scan and about the same as 1 year of natural background radiation (radiation from the sky and the ground, and through breathing, eating and drinking).
- It is possible that you may have lung cancer that is not found during your low-dose CT scans or that may grow in the time between scans.
- Not all of the cancers found by low-dose CT will be caught early enough. Screening may not make your health better or help you live longer if it finds a cancer that has already spread to other parts of the body or a type of cancer that treatment may not work as well for.
- Depending on your test results, you may need to have a lung biopsy (where a very small piece of the lung is removed) or surgery. The possible side effects of the lung biopsy are bleeding, infection or a collapsed lung. However, not many people who get screened for lung cancer go on to have lung biopsies, and when they do, these biopsies do not usually cause problems.

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Quitting smoking is one of the best things you can do to improve your overall health, including reducing your chances of getting cancer. Take advantage of our services to help you quit smoking.

#### Need this information in an accessible format?

1-877-280-8538, TTY 1-800-855-0511, [info@ontariohealth.ca](mailto:info@ontariohealth.ca)  
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To find out more about lung cancer screening services, contact your OLSP location.