

Lung Nodules

What are lung nodules?

A lung nodule (NA-jule; also known as pulmonary nodule) is a small, often ball-shaped tissue collection that can grow in the lungs. They can range in size from smaller than a pea to the size of a golf ball or larger. Most of the time, people with lung nodules have no symptoms, and the nodule is found when looking for other things on x-rays or CT scans.

If I have a lung nodule, does this mean I have cancer?

Most nodules are benign (be-NINE) and are not cancer. Infectious granulomas (gran-yoo-LO-mas) are the most common cause of benign nodules. Granulomas form when a group of immune cells in your body fight infection. A lung nodule can also be malignant (mah-LIG-nant), which means it is cancer or may become cancer. Patients who smoke or have smoked in the past, who are 50 years and older, and who have other types of cancers are at higher risk of getting lung cancer.

What tests will my doctor recommend?

Your doctor will usually look at x-rays and CT scans of your chest to check for a lung nodule. Your old x-rays or CT scans may be reviewed to see if the nodule was there before or has grown over time. If more information is needed, your doctor may also do another type of scan called positron emission tomography.

What if my doctor thinks the nodule is benign?

Your doctor may watch the nodule over time by having you return for more CT scans. The scans may be done three, six, or 12 months apart to make sure the nodule is not growing.

What if my doctor thinks the nodule is malignant or growing?

Your doctor may send you to a lung or cancer specialist if your nodule is growing or if it may be malignant. The specialist might do a biopsy, which is when a doctor takes out a small piece of lung tissue and examines it under a microscope to see if it is cancer.

What testing should be done if I'm at increased risk of lung cancer due to smoking?

If you are older than 50 years, have smoked for more than 20 years, and are still smoking or quit less than 15 years ago, your doctor will discuss annual lung cancer screening with a low-dose (meaning less radiation than normal) CT scan.

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

American Cancer Society

<https://www.cancer.org/cancer/lung-cancer/detection-diagnosis-staging/lung-nodules.html>

National Library of Medicine

<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000071.htm>

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