

# Lung cancer facts and figures

## What causes lung cancer?

There are a range of carcinogens – cancer causing agents that can lead to lung cancer. The most well-known are caused by cigarette and tobacco consumption. The link between smoking and lung cancer was established more than 50 years ago.

Smokers and ex-smokers have a particularly high risk of developing the disease. 72% of lung cancers in the UK are caused by smoking. Exposure to second hand smoke (passive smoking) is also a contributing factor.

## Environmental and work related risk

Other factors can increase your risk of developing lung cancer. Exposure to chemicals found in the work place such as asbestos, silica, diesel exhaust fumes and synthetic fibres can increase your risk.

In the environment radon gas levels vary and can increase risk. It is estimated that 8% of lung cancers in the UK are caused by air pollution.

## How common is lung cancer?

More than 48,000 people are diagnosed with lung cancer in the UK each year. It is the second most common cause of cancer in men and women.

As lung cancer is often diagnosed once it has reached the most advance stage, it is the most common cause of cancer death. One in eight people with lung cancer have never smoked.

## Is lung cancer more common in certain areas of the UK?

In the UK there is higher incidence of lung cancer in Northern England and Scotland.

Incidence is linked to patterns of tobacco addiction and exposure to carcinogens. Lung cancer is more common in economically vulnerable communities where tobacco consumption tends to be higher.



## Early detection of lung cancer

The earlier lung cancer is detected, the more effective the range of treatments are available. Lung cancer can be treated with surgery, radiotherapy and anti-cancer treatments provided in tablet or injection form.

Lung cancer screening for those at high risk was been recommended by the UK National Screening Committee in September 2022. A final decision on implementation will be made by the Health Ministers covering the UK. See our campaign [#needtoscreen](#)

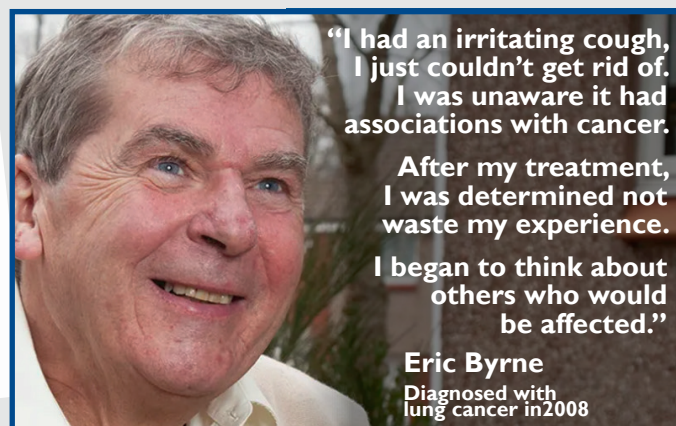
There are Lung Health Checks operating across England to find lung cancers early amongst those who have smoked and are aged 55 – 74. Some research projects are also underway in other parts of the UK.

## Symptoms linked with lung cancer

There are a range of symptoms which might be caused by lung cancer. These include a cough that doesn't go away, feeling breathless, unexplained weight loss, chest or shoulder pain, coughing up blood, hoarseness in your voice and lack of energy. Sometimes these symptoms are caused by other health changes, but don't ignore them.

## Don't worry, take action

If you, or someone you know is concerned about lung cancer it is important to talk to someone. Contacting a helpline is one option or contacting your GP and arranging a consultation will mean tests can be carried out. There are many reasons you might have chest problems. **If it is lung cancer early diagnosis and treatment could save your life.**



## Smoking and lung cancer

Stopping smoking is good for anyone. As soon as you stop smoking your risk of lung cancer starts to go down.

It's even more important to stop if you have lung cancer and are starting treatment, such as surgery, chemotherapy and radiotherapy. Smoking directly damages DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid), the genetic blueprint that controls our development and body function.

Most smokers are dependent in some way on the nicotine in the smoke. Nicotine is as addictive as heroin and cocaine. As well as this, the tobacco industry adds chemicals to increase nicotine uptake, and flavours such as honey, sugar, caramel and menthol to keep people smoking (and spending more on it).

Support services are available to help people break the habit, knowing you are not alone and getting help can make a difference:

[healthunlocked.com/quitsupport](https://healthunlocked.com/quitsupport)

## Lung cancer survival

The earlier a lung cancer is diagnosed the higher the rates of survival. Sadly many people don't find out they have lung cancer until it has spread and is not curable. Almost 35,000 people in the UK die of lung cancer each year. But there are steady improvements in one and five-year survival.

There have been many improvements through research in the last decade so we know more about the different types and sub-types of lung cancer and can offer more effective treatments.

Your overall health can affect your body's response to cancer and treatment. Living a healthy lifestyle including keeping active, eating a healthy diet and being physically active are important.

## What is being done to improve lung cancer survival?

At present lung cancer is the most common cause of cancer death, also called cancer mortality, in the UK.

Research into early diagnosis and effective treatments are vital. This leads to more treatment options that helps more people and can keep them well for longer.

Earlier diagnosis is being encourage through Lung health checks in England and campaigns to improve awareness of symptoms across the UK. The National Screening Committee has recommended the roll out of a targeted screening programme aimed at those aged 55 – 74 who are or have been smokers.

The UK health departments will confirm if this can be rolled out. In 2022 Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation launched a campaign on this [#need to screen](#)



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LUNG CANCER  
FOUNDATION

## Expect Better

For more information, or if you are affected or worried about lung cancer, get in touch:

[roycastle.org](https://roycastle.org)  
0333 323 7200

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If you are worried about lung cancer symptoms, or have been affected by lung cancer contact our Ask the Nurse service.

We are here to help on:  
0800 358 7200

or email:  
[lungcancerhelp@roycastle.org](mailto:lungcancerhelp@roycastle.org)



## More information/ sources

Incidence and mortality figures were primarily sourced from CRUK:  
[cancerresearchuk.org/health-professional/cancer-statistics/statistics-by-cancer-type/lung-cancer](https://cancerresearchuk.org/health-professional/cancer-statistics/statistics-by-cancer-type/lung-cancer) September 2022