

Lung cancer

What is lung cancer?

Lung cancer is a growth that starts in a lung. The growth develops when cells in a lung don't work properly and start to grow out of control.

The lungs

The lungs are a part of the body that helps you breathe (called the respiratory system). You have 2 lungs.

The earlier lung cancer is found, the easier it is to treat.

The lungs

These organs bring oxygen into the body and send carbon dioxide out.

Bronchi

These large tubes carry air into the lungs.

Diaphragm

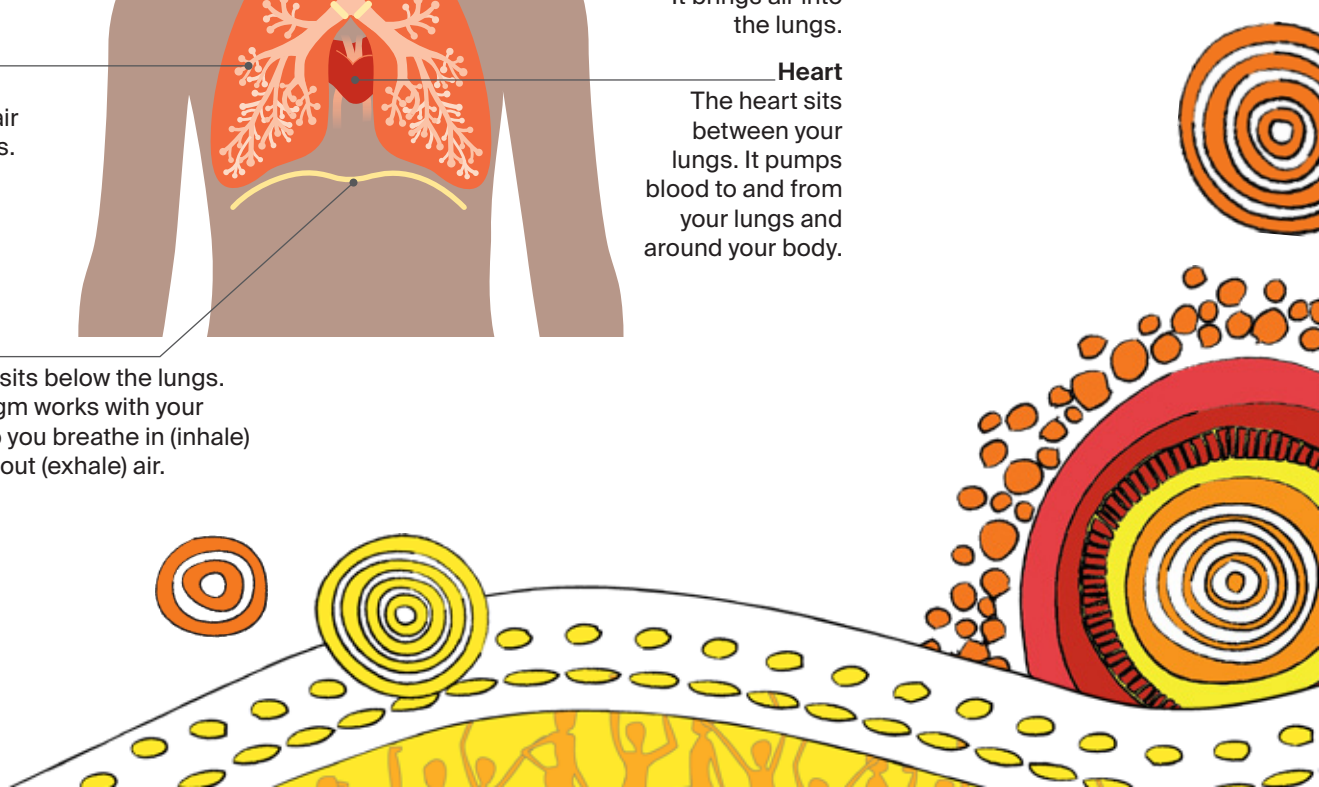
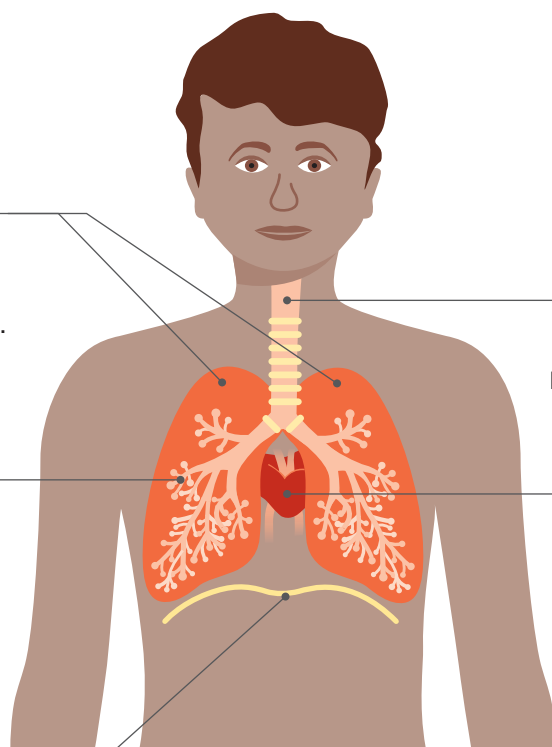
This muscle sits below the lungs. The diaphragm works with your lungs to help you breathe in (inhale) and breathe out (exhale) air.

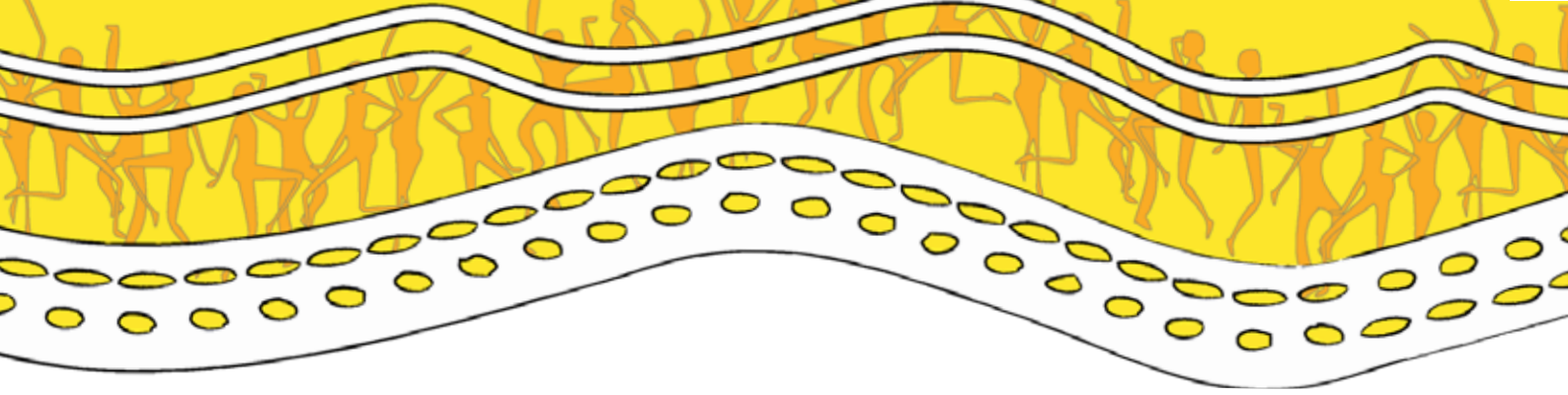
Windpipe (trachea)

This tube joins the voice box to the bronchi in the lungs. It brings air into the lungs.

Heart

The heart sits between your lungs. It pumps blood to and from your lungs and around your body.





What are the signs and symptoms of lung cancer?

You can have lung cancer without noticing anything is wrong. Or you might notice one or more of these warning signs:

- new cough or change in a cough you've had for a long time
- feeling out of breath
- pain in the chest when coughing or taking a deep breath
- coughing or spitting up blood.

These signs do not always mean you have lung cancer, but it's important to see your doctor if you have any of these symptoms. Your doctor will do some tests to work out if you have cancer or what the problem is.

What tests will I have?

You may have a range of different tests, including some of the following:

- **Chest x-ray** – This is a painless x-ray that takes a picture of your lungs.
- **Scans** – A CT (computerised tomography) scan can take more detailed pictures of your lungs. You may also have a PET (positron emission tomography) scan, which uses a special dye to help show up any cancer cells that may be in your lungs.
- **Lung function test** – This is a test to check how well your lungs are working.
- **Biopsy** – A tiny piece of lung tissue is taken out and sent to a lab for checking. This may be done using a needle through the chest (CT-guided lung biopsy) or using a thin tool that is passed through your nose or mouth into your lung (bronchoscopy). You will be given medicines to help make you comfortable for these tests.
- **Blood test** – Some blood will be taken from a vein in your arm. It will be sent to a lab to check how well other organs like the liver and kidneys are working.

What do the test results mean?

The tests will tell the doctor if you have lung cancer, what type it is, and if the cancer has spread (called the stage). There are different types of lung cancer depending on which cells are affected:

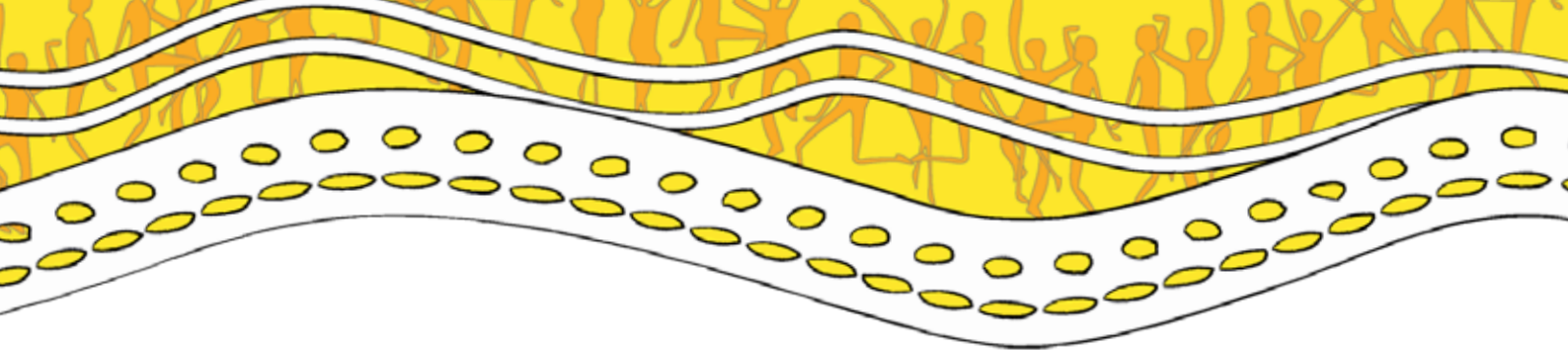
- non-small cell lung cancer (most common)
- small cell lung cancer (less common).

Knowing the type of cancer and its stage helps the doctors work out what treatment is best for you.



If you are uncomfortable about having any tests, you can ask a nurse, Aboriginal health worker or someone from your family or mob to be in the room with you.





What treatment will I need for lung cancer?

There are different types of treatment for lung cancer. You may have one or more of these treatments:

surgery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This removes the part of the lung with cancer (lobectomy) or an entire lung (pneumonectomy).
radiation therapy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This uses radiation to kill or damage cancer cells.
chemotherapy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sometimes called “chemo”, chemotherapy is strong medicine that can kill the cancer cells.
other medicines	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Special types of drugs called immunotherapy or targeted therapy may be used.



It's important to go to all of your treatment sessions. If you miss a session, it might become harder to treat the cancer.

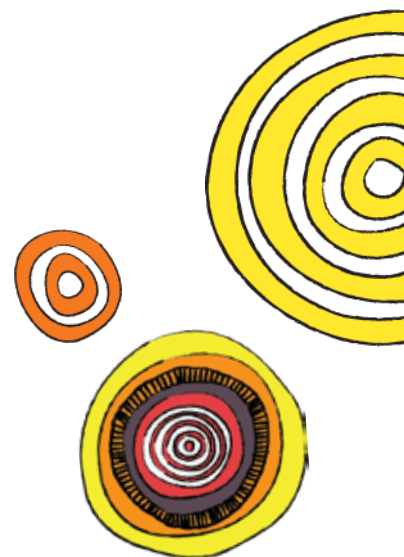
How will the treatment affect me?

Treatment for lung cancer sometimes causes other problems called side effects. Some of the common ones include:

- **Trouble breathing** – You may have some breathing problems after treatment.
- **Pain** – There may be some pain after treatment.
- **Feeling sick** – Radiation therapy, chemotherapy or other medicines may make you be sick or feel like vomiting.
- **Hair falling out** – Some drugs may make your hair fall out, but it will grow back.
- **Tiredness** – Some treatments can make you feel very tired (called fatigue).

There are usually things that can be done to help with these or any other side effects you might have.

Yarn with your doctor, nurse or Aboriginal health worker if you have any of these side effects or other troubles.





How do I cope with the cancer?



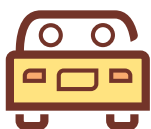
Yarn with mob

It's normal for you and your family to have lots of different feelings right now. You might find it helpful to yarn with family, mob or Elders about coping at this time.



Ask questions

You may have many questions about the cancer, its treatment and how it will affect you. Your doctor, nurse or Aboriginal health worker will help answer any questions you may have.



Get help with travel

If you have to travel a long way for treatment, you can get help to pay for travel and somewhere to stay. For more information, call 13 11 20.



Find support

Call 13 11 20 if you need support.

More information

- **Cancer Council 13 11 20**
aboriginal.cancercouncil.com.au
- **Menzies School of Health Research**
menzies.edu.au/cancer



Cancer Council NSW has adapted this fact sheet from a Menzies School of Health Research resource that was developed in consultation with a clinical advisory group and an Indigenous consultation group. It has been reviewed by cancer experts and Aboriginal people with an experience of cancer.

The design features elements from the artwork *Healing Journey* by Carissa Paglino. Carissa was born and raised in Newcastle (Awabakal country) and is a descendant of the Wanaruah people from the Upper Hunter Valley in NSW. Cancer Council NSW's respect symbol (below) was designed by Marcus Lee, a descendant of the Karajarri people.



Cancer Council NSW acknowledges Traditional Custodians of Country and recognises the continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and to Elders past, present and emerging.

