



Lung Nodule Management Communication Toolkit:

A Guide for Healthcare Professionals
to Help Support Patients Through Lung
Nodule Detection and Management





Introduction

Over the last two decades, the detection, diagnosis and treatment of lung cancer have greatly improved, thanks to critical advancements in early-detection through [low-dose CT scans](#), [diagnostic technologies](#) and [treatment options](#).

However, many patients diagnosed with [lung nodules](#) report feeling anxious and overwhelmed as they navigate the steps from lung nodule discovery to treatment plan. By enhancing communication and sharing resources, providers can better support their patients in making treatment decisions and promoting self-advocacy, ultimately improving both their quality of life and health outcomes.

The resources included in this toolkit are designed to help you strengthen partnership with your patients and your capacity to serve patients with lung cancer and their loved ones.

The Importance of Screening

[Lung cancer screening](#) is a vital component of improving patient outcomes, as low-dose CT scans may catch lung cancer at an earlier stage, when it is easier to treat. According to the American Lung Association's 2024 [State of Lung Cancer Report](#), only 27.4% of lung cancer cases in the United States are diagnosed at an early stage, when the five-year survival rate is significantly higher at 65%. Unfortunately, only 25% of lung cancer cases are diagnosed early, when treatment is more likely to be curative. Early diagnosis rates have increased by 11% over the last five years, but more work is needed to ensure all eligible individuals are screened. The American Lung Association offers many resources for patients and providers, including:

- Saved By The Scan Lung.org/savedbythescan
- Should My Patient Be Screened? [English](#) | [Spanish](#)
- Screening Health Insurance Coverage Chart [English](#) | [Spanish](#)
- Lung Cancer Screening Initiatives Lung.org/LCS-initiative
- Early Detection with a Low-Dose CT Scan [English](#)
- About the Low-Dose CT Scan [English](#)

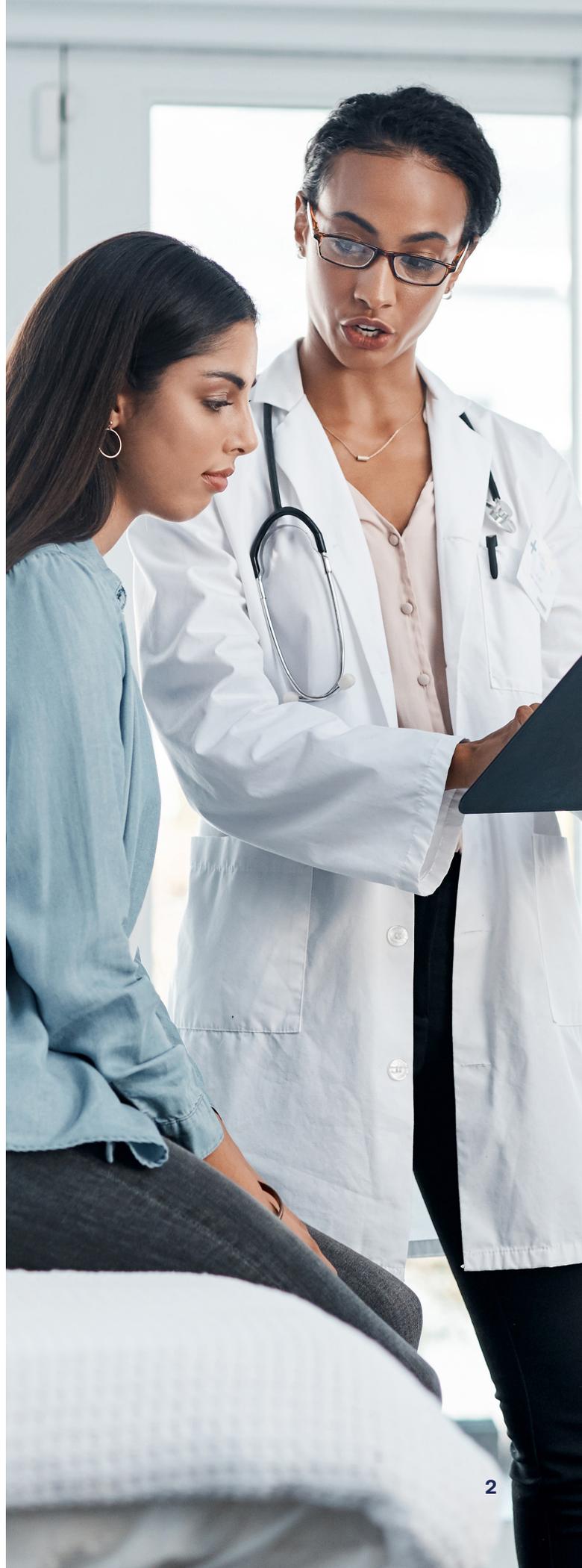
The Rise of Lung Cancer in Those Who Never Smoked

Screening is an important tool for detecting lung cancer early in individuals with a history of smoking; however, lung cancer can also impact those who have never smoked or who have smoked but do not meet the screening criteria recommended by the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately 10% to 20% of lung cancer cases in the United States occur in individuals who have never smoked or smoked fewer than 100 cigarettes in their lifetime. There are several other known [risk factors](#) that contribute to lung cancer including exposure to radon gas, second and thirdhand smoke, hazardous chemicals, particle pollution and family history. In many cases, the factors contributing to a lung cancer diagnosis are unknown.

While lung cancer is most common among individuals with a smoking history, providers should not overlook the possibility of a lung cancer diagnosis in symptomatic individuals without such history. By being cognizant that lung cancer IS a possibility among individuals without a smoking history, providers are more likely to make an accurate diagnosis early in the patient's journey. Individuals without a smoking history will often go many months without a proper diagnosis, leading to increased anxiety, fatigue and burnout. This emotional burden may reduce a patient's ability to fully participate in shared decision-making about their treatment.

A simple reminder to yourself and colleagues is, "Anyone with lungs can get lung cancer."

Anyone with Lungs Can Get Lung Cancer
Flyer [English](#)



The Nodule Detection to Treatment Plan Window

The period of time between nodule detection and the development of a [treatment action plan](#) can be extremely anxiety provoking for patients and their loved ones. The communication and coordination that occur during this window can set the tone for the provider-patient relationship and have a considerable impact on trust and overall satisfaction with care. Below are resources and guidelines to improve and support effective communication during this time:

Providers are encouraged to use the American Lung Association's [Lung Nodule Worksheet](#) to help explain each patient's specific health situation and outline possible next steps. This worksheet can help empower patients by giving them a greater sense of control during this time and guiding their personal research so they are more informed and prepared for future appointments.

Interdisciplinary communication is key to effective lung nodule management. Physicians should adhere to established guidelines for lung nodule management and share the American Lung Association's [Understanding Lung Nodule Follow-up Guidelines](#) content with patients. When patients know providers are utilizing the most current data to make evidence-based recommendations, they are more at ease with the process and greater trust and confidence is fostered.

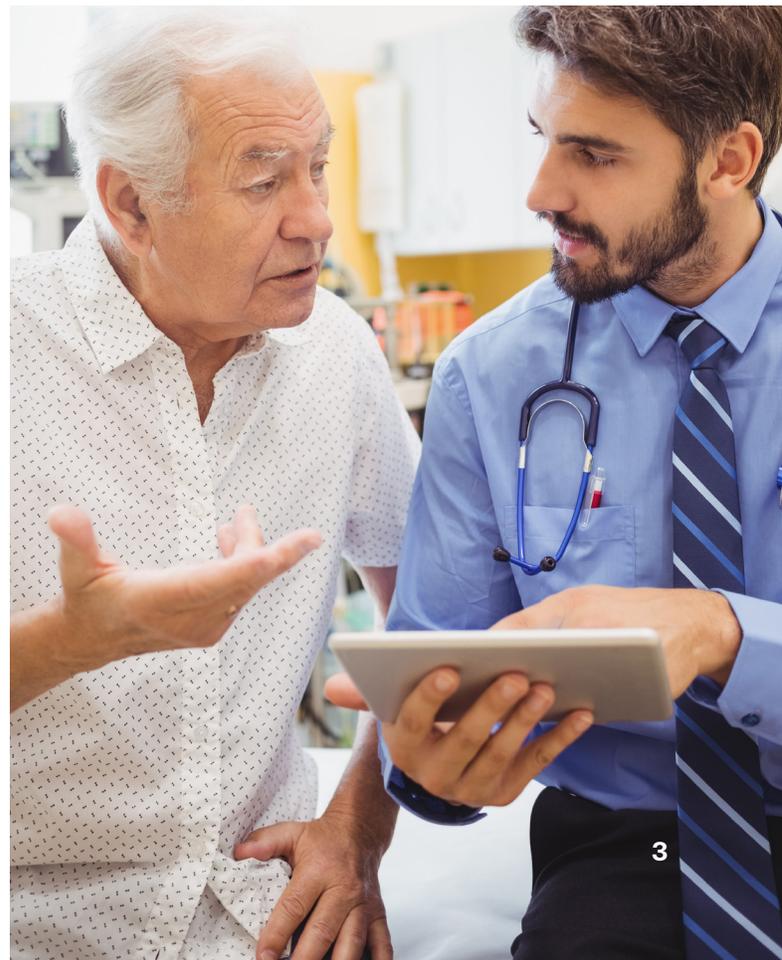
Patients often receive test results through electronic medical records (EMRs), like MyChart, before discussing the results with their physicians, leaving them to interpret and understand their own complex medical information. Providers can help prepare patients for this scenario and set clear expectations for communication with their patients. The Lung Association's [Understanding Your Lung Nodule Report](#) page can help to prepare patients for follow-up conversations with their doctor.

Providers can use trusted resources from organizations like the American Lung Association to help frame discussion and shared decision-making. Resources include the aforementioned worksheets and one pagers, as well as the resources listed below:

- [Lung Nodules \(Pulmonary Nodules\)](#)
- [How Is Lung Cancer Diagnosed?](#)
- [Lung Cancer Staging](#)
- [Lung Cancer Treatment By Stage](#)

More resources for those diagnosed with lung cancer can be found at [Lung.org/lung-cancer](https://www.lung.org/lung-cancer).

Providers should recognize that each patient's experience and health history is unique. Although providers may see multiple similar cases each day, every piece of news and new diagnostic procedure is likely unfamiliar to the patient and should be explained carefully and clearly. Using the resources above can offer guidance.





The Importance of Accuracy

Two important aspects of the diagnostic and staging processes are sometimes overlooked: knowing which lymph nodes are involved and determining whether a patient has any [biomarkers](#).

Lymph node involvement: Lung cancer often spreads to the lymph nodes in the lung and chest. When the cancer has not spread to other organs in the body, it is important to accurately identify which lymph nodes in the chest are cancerous. This information directly impacts a patient's stage and, consequently, treatment options. If this step is skipped or not performed thoroughly, there is a risk of mistaging the cancer, which can lead to inappropriate treatment.

Biomarker testing: Biomarker testing looks for changes in the DNA of a tumor as well as other markers, such as proteins in the blood. The results from comprehensive biomarker testing can determine whether a patient is eligible for certain [targeted therapies](#) and [immunotherapies](#).

When patients are anxious and overwhelmed, they may struggle to advocate for the necessary tests and procedures that lead to an accurate diagnosis and effective treatment. It is the provider's responsibility to deliver the best possible care, which often includes using advanced and thorough biopsy and histologic evaluation tools. Along with [national lung cancer treatment guidelines](#), the resources below may help you better understand the often-overlooked aspects of lung cancer diagnosis and treatment.

- [The Importance of Accurate Lung Cancer Staging](#)
- [Lung Cancer Biopsy](#)
- [Lung Cancer Biomarker Testing](#)
- [Navigating Biomarker Testing: A Checklist for Each Stage of your Journey](#)

Lung Cancer Support Resources

One of the best ways you can support your patients is to connect them with resources that meet their needs:

- [Find Support Groups](#): Help your patient connect with in-person and online support.
- [Lung Cancer Clinical Trials](#): Search for lung cancer clinical trials for your patient.
- [Lung Cancer Treatment Guidelines](#): Review the lung cancer treatment guidelines and share them with your patient when discussing treatment options.
- [Lung Cancer Support Group Facilitator Training](#): Become a certified facilitator to host and facilitate support groups for lung cancer survivors and caregivers.
- [Lung Cancer Screening Assistance](#): Learn about how our Lung Health Navigators can help determine if a patient is eligible for screening and guide them each step of the way.
- [Patient and Caregiver Network](#): Provide patients direct access to lung disease management tools, education and connection to other patients and caregivers.
- [Smoking Cessation Resources](#): We have a variety of smoking cessation resources and programs for patients who are ready to quit smoking.

Summary

The American Lung Association is committed to supporting providers as they care and treat individuals with lung nodules. Effective communication is key to assisting patients as they navigate this challenging time. Communication among providers themselves is also important, as mixed messages, poor handoffs and delays can negatively impact both a patient's quality of life and their treatment outcomes. Though no one wants to hear that they have a lung nodule, by following the guidance outlined in this toolkit, you can play a role in improving the quality of life of those facing the possibility or reality of a lung cancer diagnosis.

This educational program is distributed with support from Olympus.

