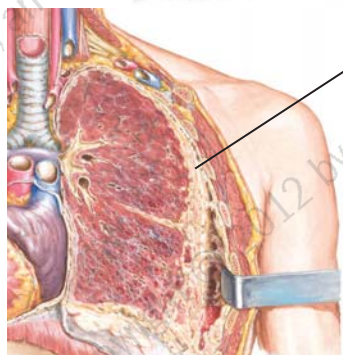


MANAGING YOUR MESOTHELIOMA

Mesothelioma is a rare cancer that affects the mesothelium. About 3000 new cases are diagnosed in the United States each year. More men than women get this illness, and risks increase with age.



The mesothelium is a sac covering and protecting some internal organs. In most cases, cancer begins in the pleura (membrane around lungs and lining the chest wall) or peritoneum (membrane lining the abdomen).

Working with asbestos is the major risk factor. A history of asbestos exposure at work is reported in about 70% to 80% of all cases.

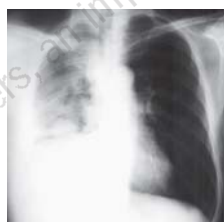
Symptoms may not appear until 30 to 50 years after exposure. If the cancer spreads, symptoms may include:



Shortness of breath, chest pain



Swelling of neck and face



Your doctor will check your medical history (especially history of asbestos exposure), examine you, and order x-rays, lung function tests, CT, or MRI. A biopsy is needed to confirm the diagnosis.

What Is Mesothelioma?

Mesothelioma is a rare cancer that affects the mesothelium. The mesothelium is a sac that covers and protects some internal organs. In most cases, the cancer begins in the pleura (membrane around the lungs and lining the wall inside the chest) or peritoneum (membrane lining the abdominal cavity). About 3000 new cases are diagnosed in the United States each year. More men than women get this illness, and risks increase with age.

What Causes Mesothelioma?

Working with asbestos is the major risk factor. However, it can occur in some people without any asbestos exposure. The combination of smoking and asbestos exposure increases the risk.

What Are the Symptoms of Mesothelioma?

Symptoms may not appear until 30 to 50 years after asbestos exposure. Symptoms of pleural mesothelioma include shortness of breath and chest pain. Signs and symptoms of peritoneal mesothelioma include weight loss, abdominal pain and swelling, bowel obstruction, blood clotting abnormalities, anemia, and fever.

If cancer spreads to other body parts, pain, trouble swallowing, or neck or face swelling may occur.

How Is Mesothelioma Diagnosed?

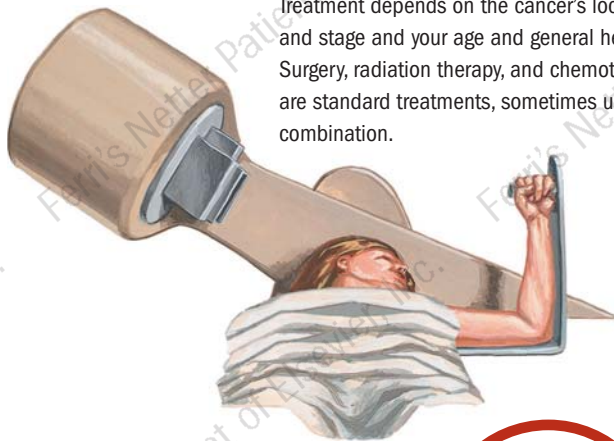
Diagnosing this illness is often hard, because symptoms are similar to those of other conditions. The doctor will check the medical history (especially history of asbestos exposure), do a physical examination, and order x-rays, lung function tests, computed tomography (CT), or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI).

A biopsy is needed to confirm the diagnosis. In a biopsy, a surgeon removes a sample of tissue for study with a microscope.

The doctor may do thoracoscopy for cancer in the chest. The doctor makes a small cut through the chest and puts in a thin, lighted tube (thoracoscope) to look inside.

The doctor may do peritoneoscopy for cancer in the abdomen (belly). In this case, a similar instrument, called a peritoneoscope, is used.

Treatment depends on the cancer's location and stage and your age and general health. Surgery, radiation therapy, and chemotherapy are standard treatments, sometimes used in combination.



Don't smoke and avoid being around secondhand smoke.



Don't miss follow-up appointments.



Call your doctor if you have chest pain, shortness of breath, abdominal pain, trouble swallowing, or a fever.

How Is Mesothelioma Treated?

The doctor will also want to learn the stage of the disease, or how far it has spread. Knowing the stage helps the doctor plan treatment. Mesothelioma can be localized (found only on the membrane) or advanced (spread to lymph nodes, lungs, chest wall, or abdominal organs).

Treatment depends on the cancer's location and stage and your age and general health.

Surgery, radiation therapy, and chemotherapy are sometimes combined. The doctor may remove part of the lining of the chest or abdomen and some tissue around it. Radiation therapy involves using high-energy x-rays to kill cancer. Radiation may come from a machine or from putting materials that produce radiation where cancer cells are found. Chemotherapy uses drugs to kill cancer cells. Most drugs are injected into a vein (intravenous, or IV).

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Mesothelioma:

- ✓ **DO** report symptoms to your doctor.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if you have chest pain, shortness of breath, abdominal pain, trouble swallowing, or a fever.
- ⊗ **DON'T** smoke.
- ⊗ **DON'T** miss follow-up appointments.
- ⊗ **DON'T** be afraid to ask for pain medicine, especially after surgery.

FROM THE DESK OF

NOTES

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following source:

- National Cancer Institute Information Cancer Information Service
Tel: (800) 422-6237
Website: <http://cis.nci.nih.gov/>