



FROM THE OFFICE OF DR.

# Lung cancer screening: What to expect

Lung cancer can sometimes be detected with a low-dose screening CT (computed tomography) scan. During the scan, you will lie down in a donut-like structure while x-rays are passed through your body. Computers then use these x-rays to produce images of the inside of your body. The scan does not hurt and takes only a few seconds to complete.

## Benefits of screening

Screening for lung cancer with a chest CT scan has been shown to lower your chance of dying from lung cancer by 20%. That means that for every 5 people who would have died from lung cancer without screening, 1 of these 5 will not.

## Downside of screening

**False alarms.** Screening for lung cancer with a chest CT has been shown to find a small spot or spots (called lung nodules) in the lungs of at least one-quarter of everyone who gets the CT scan. Only 3 or 4 out of 100 of the lung nodules found are cancer, while the rest are small scars that will never affect your health.

For many of the small lung nodules found, there is no way to tell without additional tests if they are a small scar or a lung cancer. These tests usually include CT scans done over time to see if the lung nodule grows. If the lung nodule is large enough, a biopsy may also be required. Therefore,

many people who have a lung cancer screening CT scan and do not have lung cancer will have additional tests performed.

The physician who ordered the screening test will be able to advise you about how the lung nodule should be evaluated. He or she may choose to have you visit a lung nodule clinic for advice as well.

**Radiation exposure.** CT scans deliver a very small amount of radiation to your chest in order to obtain the picture of your lungs. The dose of radiation from a screening CT scan is quite low (only one-fifth of a standard chest CT scan). The consequences of radiation from lung cancer screening are unknown, though they are expected to be much smaller than the benefits of the program.

**Cost.** Most insurance programs



do not currently cover the cost of a lung cancer screening chest CT, but they usually do cover the evaluation of any abnormal findings.

## Quit smoking!

If you currently smoke, you can lower your risk of dying from lung cancer by quitting smoking. The amount your risk will be lowered by quitting smoking is greater than the amount your risk will be lowered by being screened with a CT scan. If you smoke, try to quit. Talk to your doctor about the best strategies for quitting.