

COMMONLY USED CANCER CARE TERMS & WHAT THEY MEAN



If you or your loved one is experiencing a “first” related to small cell lung cancer (SCLC) – a new diagnosis, a shift in treatment course or an addition to a care plan – **you may suddenly start to hear unfamiliar words and phrases.**

Developed with the help of lung cancer organizations and others in the cancer community, **this glossary breaks down some of the most commonly-used terms associated with cancer care and why they are important to understand.** You may find it helpful to print this list and keep it close by for reference during conversations with healthcare team members.

Diagnosis & Testing

Term	Definition	Why is it important?
Blood chemistry test	A test performed on a blood sample to measure the amount of certain substances in the bloodstream, such as electrolytes, fats, proteins, glucose and enzymes. ¹	This test provides important information about how well the liver and kidneys are functioning. An abnormal amount of a substance in the blood can be a sign of disease or side effect of treatment. ^{1,2}
Complete blood count (CBC)	The measure of the number of red blood cells, white blood cells and platelets in the blood. ¹	<p>Blood cells (including red and white blood cells and platelets) have three main functions: transport carbon dioxide and oxygen to and from the lungs, fight infection and control bleeding.¹</p> <p>A complete blood count (CBC) lab test measures whether there’s a healthy level of these blood cells in the body. CBC and blood chemistry tests both indicate important health factors that help shape an SCLC treatment plan.²</p>

Diagnosis & Testing

Term	Definition	Why is it important?
CT scan (CAT scan)	A computerized tomography (CT) scan combines a series of images taken from different angles around the body and uses computer processing to create cross-sectional images (slices) of the bones, blood vessels and soft tissues inside the body. ³	A CT scan is a non-invasive method that can help doctors examine potential internal injuries. It can be used to visualize nearly all parts of the body and is used to diagnose disease or injury as well as to plan medical, surgical or radiation treatment. ^{2,4}
Lymph node	A small, bean-shaped structure that is part of the body's immune system. There are hundreds of lymph nodes found throughout the body. They are connected to one another by lymph vessels. Clusters of lymph nodes are found in the neck, underarm, chest, and groin. ¹	Lymph nodes are a vital part of the immune system. They are responsible for filtering substances that travel through the body and contain white blood cells that fight infection and disease. They are where immune cells mature.
Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)	A procedure that uses radio waves, a powerful magnet, and a computer to make a series of detailed pictures of areas inside the body. A contrast agent, such as gadolinium, may be injected into a vein to help the tissues and organs show up more clearly in the picture. ¹	Magnetic resonance imaging may be used to help diagnose disease, plan treatment, or find out how well treatment is working. It is especially useful for imaging of the brain, spinal cord, heart and blood vessels; the bones, joints, and other soft tissues; and organs in the pelvis, abdomen and breast. ¹

Diagnosis & Testing

Term	Definition
Neuroendocrine tumor	<p>A tumor that forms from cells that release hormones into the blood in response to a signal from the nervous system.¹ Neuroendocrine tumors, such as SCLC, may make higher-than-normal amounts of hormones and can cause many different symptoms.¹</p> <p>Some possible symptoms include fatigue, loss of appetite, unexplained weight loss, persistent pain in a specific area, a lump in any part of the body, nausea or vomiting, a persistent cough or hoarseness, diarrhea, facial flushing, high or low levels of glucose in the blood, gastric ulcer disease, skin rash, confusion, anxiety and certain nutritional deficiencies.⁵</p>
Non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC)	<p>The most common type of lung cancer. NSCLC includes three main subtypes, all of which start from different types of lung cells but are grouped together due to their often-similar treatment and outlook.⁶ These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adenocarcinoma, which starts in cells that would normally secrete substances such as mucus. It is usually found in the outer parts of the lung and is more likely to be found before it has spread.⁶• Squamous cell carcinoma, which starts in squamous cells. These are flat cells that line the inside of the airways in the lungs.⁶• Large cell (undifferentiated) carcinoma, which can appear in any part of the lung. It tends to grow and spread quickly, which can make it harder to treat. A subtype of this cancer, known as large cell neuroendocrine carcinoma, is fast-growing and very similar to SCLC.⁶ <p>NSCLC makes up about 80 to 85 percent of lung cancers.⁶</p>

Diagnosis & Testing

Term	Definition	Why is it important?
PET scan	A technique in which radioactive glucose is injected into a vein. A scanner is then used to make digital pictures of areas inside the body where that glucose is absorbed. ¹	Cancer cells absorb more glucose than normal cells do. ¹ By observing areas in the body where more glucose is absorbed, the PET scan can determine where a tumor is in the body and if it has spread. ⁴

Small cell lung cancer (SCLC)	An aggressive (fast-growing) cancer that forms in tissues of the lung and can spread to other parts of the body. ¹ SCLC gets its name from the way its cells look under a microscope; they are round, oval or spindle-shaped and smaller than both normal cells and the cells of the other type of lung cancer (NSCLC). ² This type of lung cancer tends to grow and spread faster than NSCLC. SCLC tends to respond well initially to chemotherapy and radiation therapy. However, for many people, the cancer may return at some point and require additional treatment. ⁶
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Staging, Treatment & Supportive Care

Term	Definition	Why is it important?
Adjuvant Therapy	A secondary treatment given after the primary treatment to lower the risk that the cancer will come back. ⁷ Adjuvant therapy may include surgery, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, hormone therapy, targeted therapy, or biological therapy. ⁷	It can increase effectiveness of treatment and can lessen the chances of cancer coming back. ⁷

Staging, Treatment & Supportive Care

Term	Definition	Why is it important?
Bronchoscopy	<p>This is a procedure in which a bronchoscope is inserted through the nose or mouth and into the lungs, to allow the doctor to look directly into the airways and lungs. A bronchoscope is a thin, tube-like instrument with a light and a lens and may also have a tool to remove tissue which can be checked under a microscope for signs of disease.⁸</p>	<p>A bronchoscopy may be performed to collect a biopsy sample to be tested for cancer or to perform some treatment procedures.⁸</p>
Clinical Trial	<p>A type of research study that tests how well new treatments work in people.¹</p>	<p>Clinical trials test new treatment approaches to find out how well they work in people. These studies test new treatments, diagnostic tests, and clinical care approaches.^{1,2}</p>
Complementary and Alternative Medicine	<p>Complementary and alternative medicine are terms used to describe techniques or approaches that are used along with or instead of standard treatment.⁹</p> <p>Complementary and alternative medicine may include diet, megadose vitamins, herbal preparations, special teas, acupuncture, massage therapy, magnet therapy, spiritual healing, and meditation.⁹</p> <p>Usually less is known about most types of complementary and alternative medicine than about standard treatments, which go through a long and careful research process to prove they are safe and effective.⁹</p>	

Staging, Treatment & Supportive Care

Term	Definition
Healthcare team	<p>A group of various professionals who each provide care and answer patients' questions about different medical, physical, emotional or spiritual aspects of cancer.¹⁰</p> <p>Doctors who specialize in the diagnosis and treatment of cancer are called oncologists and there are a few different types. Medical oncologists treat and manage clinical care for individuals with cancer. Surgical oncologists are doctors who specialize in treating cancer with surgical methods. Finally, radiation oncologists treat tumors or cancer with radiation therapy.¹⁰</p> <p>Oncology nurses, along with oncologists, provide bedside care and help patients and their families understand their cancer and treatment plan.¹⁰</p> <p>People may also have access to other healthcare team members including oncology social workers, psychiatrists and clergy members, who can provide supportive care related to the emotional and spiritual aspects of cancer.¹⁰</p>
Hospice care	<p>A program that gives special care to people who are near the end of life and have stopped treatment.¹</p> <p>The goal of hospice care – which offers physical, emotional, social and spiritual support to those who are nearing end of life – is to help patients feel as comfortable as possible by controlling pain and other symptoms. It is typically given at home but can also be given in a hospital or nursing home.¹</p>

Staging, Treatment & Supportive Care

Term	Definition	Why is it important?
Support group	<p>A group of people with common experiences or concerns who provide each other with encouragement, comfort, and advice. A few examples of lung cancer support groups recommended by the American Cancer Association.¹¹</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Better Breathers Club• Lung Cancer Survivors• Imerman Angels	<p>Being able to speak freely within a trusted and supporting group can positively impact your health.¹¹ Many support groups offer educational resources, virtual and in-person meetings, and mentorship programs.</p>
Metastasis	<p>When cancer cells spread from the place of origin to other parts of the body.¹</p>	<p>SCLC cells are small, but they can grow very quickly, creating tumors that often spread to other parts of the body, such as the brain, liver and bone.¹²</p>
Oxygen concentrator	<p>Oxygen concentrators take in air from the room and filter out nitrogen. The process provides the higher amounts of oxygen needed for oxygen therapy.</p> <p>Concentrators may be large and stationary or small and portable. Concentrators are different than tanks or other containers supplying oxygen because they use electrical pumps to concentrate the continuous supply of oxygen that comes from the surrounding air.¹³</p>	<p>To survive, we need oxygen going from our lungs to the cells in our body. Sometimes the amount of oxygen in our blood can fall below normal levels. Certain diseases, such as asthma, COVID-19, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), the flu, and lung cancer can cause oxygen levels to drop. When a person's oxygen levels are too low, a health care provider may prescribe an oxygen concentrator for the person to use to take in extra oxygen.¹³</p>

Staging, Treatment & Supportive Care

Term	Definition	Why is it important?
Palliative care	Care given to improve the quality of life for patients who have a serious or life-threatening disease. ¹	<p>Palliative care is used to prevent or treat certain side effects of any type of disease, including SCLC, and its treatment.</p> <p>Palliative care can help ease physical symptoms as well as emotional problems related to disease or its treatment.²</p>
Peripheral neuropathy	A nerve problem that causes pain, numbness, tingling, swelling or muscle weakness in different parts of the body. ¹	Peripheral neuropathy is a possible side effect of chemotherapy, and its symptoms may be controlled with over the counter or prescription medications if a doctor suggests them. Pain can also be managed with techniques such as physical therapy and massage therapy. ²
Prophylactic cranial irradiation (PCI)	A type of radiation therapy that is used to prevent the recurrence of tumors in the brain and central nervous system. ¹⁴	The goal of this therapy is to prevent the recurrence of tumors in the brain and central nervous system. ¹⁴
Pulmonary rehabilitation	A program of education and exercise used to help improve lung function after surgery ¹⁵ , as well as to reduce symptoms and improve quality of life for people living with SCLC and other diseases. ¹⁵	The skills and knowledge learned in the program will help you feel better and manage your chronic lung disease. ¹⁵

Staging, Treatment & Supportive Care

Term	Definition	Why is it important?
Remission	<p>When cancer signs and symptoms decrease (partial remission) or disappear (complete remission).¹</p>	<p>Remission means that signs and symptoms of cancer are decreased, and it can be either “partial” or “complete.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Partial remission, also known as partial response, means that treatment is working against the cancer, but the disease has not gone away completely.¹⁶• Complete remission, also known as complete response, means that signs and symptoms of cancer have disappeared.¹¹ Some people in complete remission may get maintenance therapy, which is a treatment that helps lower the chance of having the cancer come back.^{1,17}
Staging	<p>Stage refers to the extent of cancer, such as how large the tumor is and if it has spread. Knowing the stage of your cancer helps your doctor:¹⁸</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understand how serious your cancer is and your chances of survival• Plan the best treatment for you• Identify clinical trials that may have other treatment options for you	<p>A doctor may use imaging techniques, surgery or a pathology examination to find a tumor. Learning the stage of cancer can help a doctor determine a care plan and track treatment results.²</p> <p>Doctors usually break SCLC into two main stages: limited-stage and extensive-stage.</p> <p>Limited-stage describes cancer that is only present in one part of the chest. Extensive-stage describes disease that has spread to other parts of the lungs, or other parts of the body.¹⁹</p> <p>Some healthcare providers and organizations may utilize a numerical system for staging (separating different stages of SCLC using numbers).¹⁹</p>

Staging, Treatment & Supportive Care

Term	Definition
Treatment plan	<p>A plan with information about a person's disease, treatment options and goals, possible side effects of treatment and how long a treatment will take.¹ There are different treatment choices for SCLC:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• First-line therapy is the first treatment given for a disease; examples include chemotherapy and radiation therapy.²⁰• Second-line therapy is given if the first treatment option used does not work or stops working.²⁰ <p>A doctor will usually suggest second-line therapy options if disease spreads after initial treatment and progresses to extensive-stage, or if the person receiving treatment experiences a sensitivity to the medicine.²⁰</p>

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