Lung Cancer Prevention

Quitting smoking even within two years before a lung cancer diagnosis improves survival.

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Smoking cessation at any point before a lung cancer diagnosis improves overall survival.

Aline Fusco Fares, MD, of Princess Margaret Cancer Centre in Toronto, and colleagues analyzed more than 35,000 patients in the International Lung Cancer Consortium cohort. Nearly half were current smokers when diagnosed, about 30% were former smokers and about 20% had never smoked.

Those who quit more than five years before their lung cancer diagnosis showed a 20% improvement in overall survival, while those who quit two to five years prior had a 16% improvement. But even those who quit less than two years prior had a 12% survival benefit compared with those who still smoked.

The take-home message, Fares says, is that “it’s never too late to quit smoking.”

Current or former heavy smokers are advised to undergo CT scan screening to detect cancer early, when it’s easier to treat, but only around 2% do so. New guidelines from the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force would expand screening eligibility.

Currently, screening is recommended for people age 55 and older who have smoked the equivalent of at least a pack a day for 30 years and who either still smoke or quit within the past 15 years. The proposed guidelines lower the screening age to 50 and the pack-year threshold to 20. These changes could nearly double the number of people who meet the screening criteria and would include more women and Black people.

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