

Respiratory Department Patient Information

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Information

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Solitary Pulmonary Nodules

What is a Pulmonary Nodule?

A pulmonary nodule is an area of roundish shadowing usually 1cm or smaller in the lung.

Why do pulmonary nodules occur?

Pulmonary nodules are very common. Approximately 1 in 4 (25%) of older people who smoke or who are ex-smokers have nodules detected on a CT Scan. People who have never smoked can also get nodules.

Most nodules are benign (non-cancerous), some are caused by scarring from previous respiratory infections. They are very common in people who have had TB (Tuberculosis), and can occur in people who have had other conditions such as Rheumatoid Arthritis.

In a small number of people the nodule could be a very early lung cancer or a secondary cancer that has spread from elsewhere in the body.

Diagnosing Pulmonary Nodules

Nodules are sometimes found on a chest x-ray but in most cases they are too small and are only seen when the person has a CT Scan. Pulmonary nodules are often found when the person is having a CT Scan for another reason.

It is not always possible to know the cause of a nodule from the CT Scan alone and due to the nodules being so small they are too difficult to take a biopsy (which is a test performed to take a piece of the nodule to test). Instead, we keep a close eye on the nodule by monitoring the size by repeating the CT Scan after a certain period of time.

The length of time between scans is decided by our Respiratory Consultants at our multi-disciplinary meeting using the BTS (British Thoracic Society) guidelines on the management of Pulmonary Nodules.

We will automatically arrange your CT and you will receive a letter in the post with the date and time.

It may be necessary to have a number of CT Scans over a number of years. This will depend upon:

- your age,
- if you smoke,
- your general health,

In some cases you may be asked to have another type of scan called a PET-CT (Position Emission Tomography).

Benign nodules tend to grow very slowly, or may not grow at all. If the nodule grows or changes in any way, your Respiratory Consultant may arrange for you to have further tests and investigations.

Soon after your scan you may have an outpatient's appointment with your Respiratory Consultant or Specialist Nurse. Sometimes the Nurse Specialist may give you the results over the telephone.

If you have any of the following symptoms between your scans, please inform your Nurse Specialist who will discuss with your Consultant whether you need to be seen in an outpatient appointment sooner.

- pain in your chest,
- shortness of breath,
- repeated chest infections,
- coughing up blood,

If you have any questions or worries about your condition please contact

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