



The Power of Early Detection: Lung Cancer Screening Saves Lives

Dr. Michael Marsh has both personal and professional reasons for his choice of pulmonology as a medical specialty.

First, both of his grandparents were heavy smokers, and both died of lung cancer within a year of each other while he was studying to become a doctor.

Second, during his medical school rotation with a lung specialist, he watched the physician identify and remove a tiny lesion on a patient's lung during a routine CT scan. The spot turned out to be lung cancer, and removing it saved the patient's life.



"My grandparents had known about spots on their lungs for years, and I realized then that they could have been diagnosed and treated if their cancer had been identified earlier," says Dr. Marsh, who joined the Jupiter Medical Center pulmonology team in late 2024 after serving as a cancer liaison physician and lung nodule specialist in previous roles at previous institutions.

Today, his mantra as a lung specialist is simple and straightforward: "We need to detect lung cancer early because that's when patients have the best chance of survival."

Early screening is key to successful treatment

Indeed, just as advancements in treating and curing other cancers have led to regular screenings for breast, colorectal and prostate cancer, pulmonologists are making similar strides in treating lung cancer, especially if it is identified as early as possible.

In 2024, lung cancer was the leading cause of cancer death among U.S. men (65,790) and women (59,280) and the second most commonly diagnosed cancer in the U.S., behind prostate cancer for men and breast cancer for women, according to the American Cancer Society.

"Often, lung cancer does not cause symptoms until the later stages, when treatment and cure is more difficult," points out Dr. Marsh. "That's why detecting it early allows for the best possible outcome and, often, a chance for a cure. The good news is that lung cancer screening through low-dose CT scans has revolutionized early detection."

Yet cancer statistics indicate that only about 16% of patients who qualify for lung cancer screenings are actually undergoing regular scans. And while that percentage has grown in recent years, "more work needs to be and more attention needs to be paid to this population," says Dr. Marsh.

Are you eligible for screening?

Current guidelines from the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommend a yearly low-dose CT scan for people who are most at risk of lung cancer. They include:

- People aged 50-80 who currently smoke and have a 20 pack-year smoking history (1 pack a day for 20 years, or 2 packs a day for 10 years, etc.)
- People ages 50-80 who have a 20 pack-year smoking history and have quit within the past 15 years

Other risk factors for lung cancer include work in key industries/jobs, including waste management, cooking over open flames, and exposure to radon, asbestos, diesel exhaust, smoke and other irritants at work or home.

If your doctor does not recommend a lung cancer screening during an annual wellness visit, Dr. Marsh encourages patients to ask about their eligibility for screening or to contact the Jupiter Medical Center Thoracic Surgery and Lung Center of Excellence at The Anderson Family Cancer Institute, by calling 561-263-4437.