



Your Courage. Our Expertise.

What Now?

A Practical Guide for People With
a New Diagnosis of Lung Cancer



What's Next After a Lung Cancer Diagnosis?

Once you've received a lung cancer diagnosis, the next step is understanding more about your condition and the treatment plan that lies ahead. Much consideration goes into creating a treatment plan, setting up your team, and beginning your cancer treatments. A cancer diagnosis impacts all areas of your life and the lives of your loved ones. We hope the following preparation road map will help guide you and your family throughout this process.

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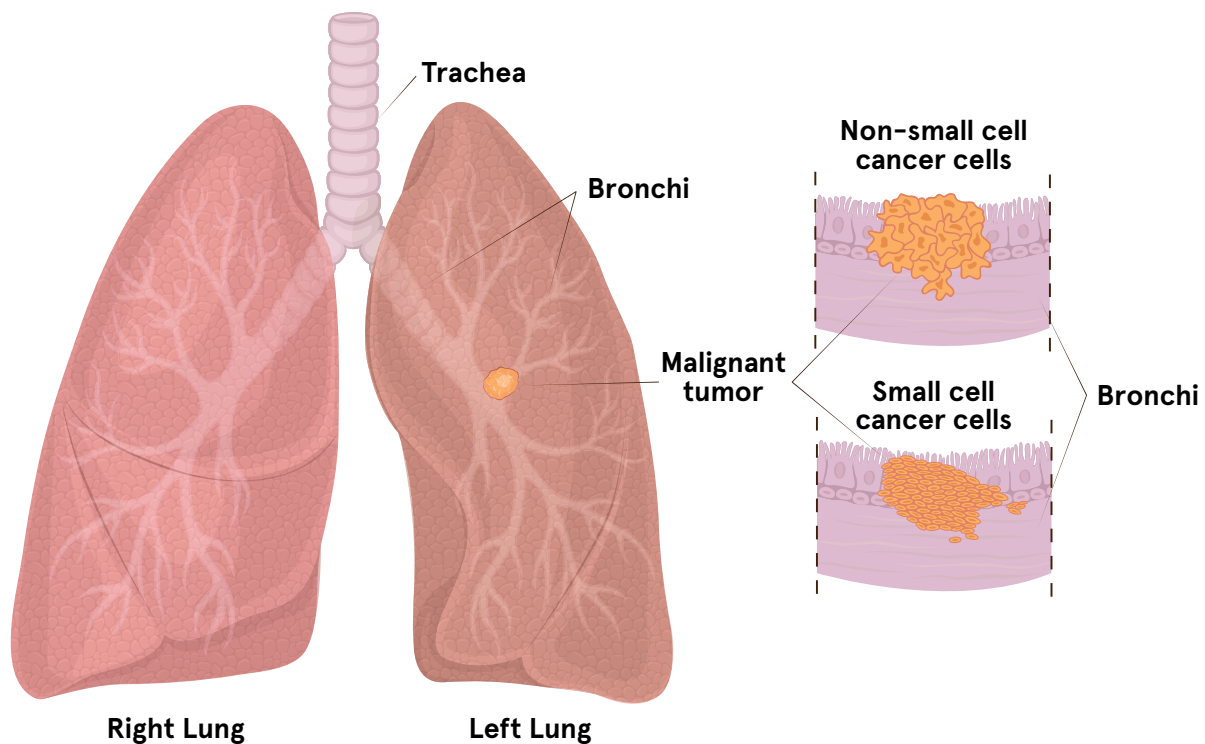
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Understanding the Types of Lung Cancer

The first step after receiving a lung cancer diagnosis is understanding the type of lung cancer you have. Lung cancer is generally divided into small cell lung cancer (SCLC) and non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC).



Small Cell Lung Cancer

Small cell lung cancer (SCLC) makes up about 10–20% of all lung cancer cases. Cancer cells form tumors in one or both lungs. If not found early, small cell lung cancer is most likely to spread to the bronchi. These are the airways from the trachea to the lungs. Once small cell lung cancer impacts the bronchi, it spreads quickly to other areas of the body, including the lymph nodes. It's important to note that small cell lung cancer is usually caused by exposure to tobacco smoke, though there are other risk factors.

There are two categories of small cell lung cancer, which refers to how the cancer looks under a microscope:

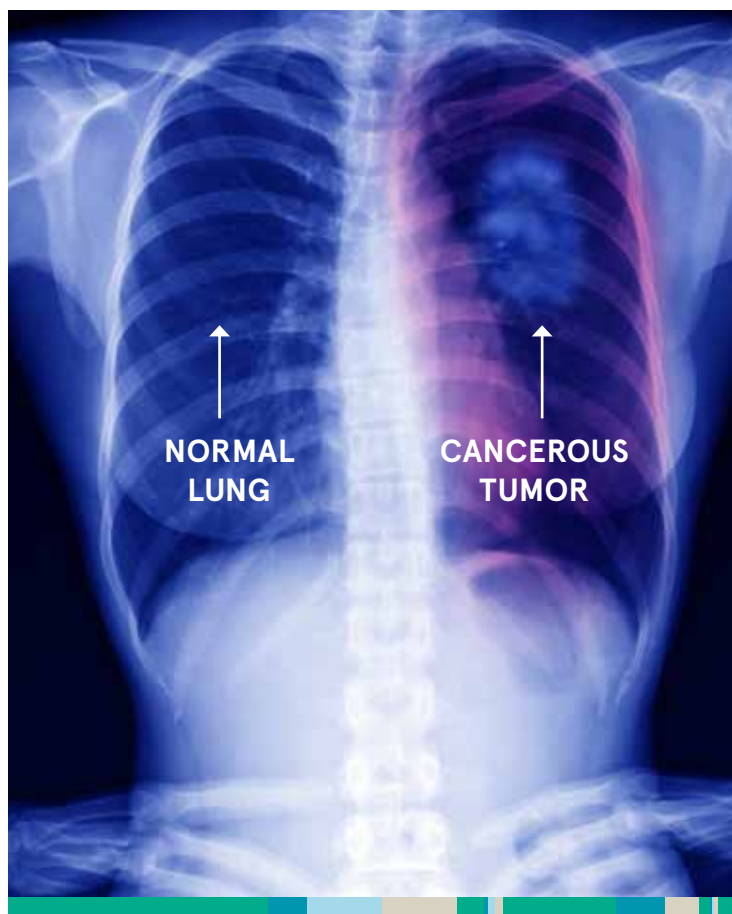
1. **Small cell carcinoma:** this is the most common form of small cell lung cancer, and it appears flat under a microscope. It looks similar to a grain of oatmeal which is why it's sometimes called oat cell lung cancer.
2. **Combined small cell carcinoma:** this is a tumor that includes small cell carcinoma cells and a portion of non-small cell lung cancer cells.

Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer

Non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC) accounts for about 80–90% of all lung cancer cases. Typically, this form of lung cancer grows slower than small cell lung cancer. However, because it grows slowly, sometimes people don't experience any signs or symptoms until it has advanced. Non-small cell lung cancer is broken down into three primary categories:

- Carcinogenic of the lung
- Squamous cell
- Large-cell undifferentiated carcinoma

Adenocarcinoma is the most common type of lung cancer, making up about 30% of all lung cancer diagnoses.



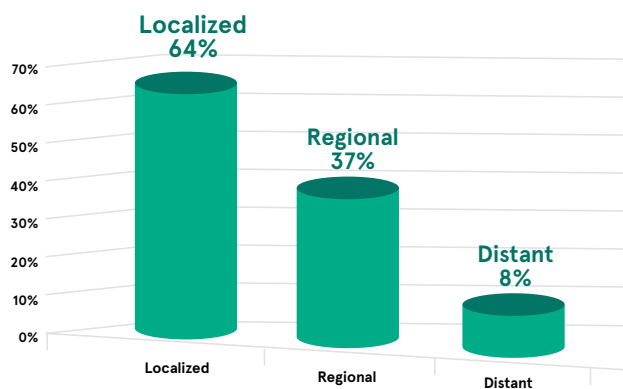


Lung Cancer Prognosis

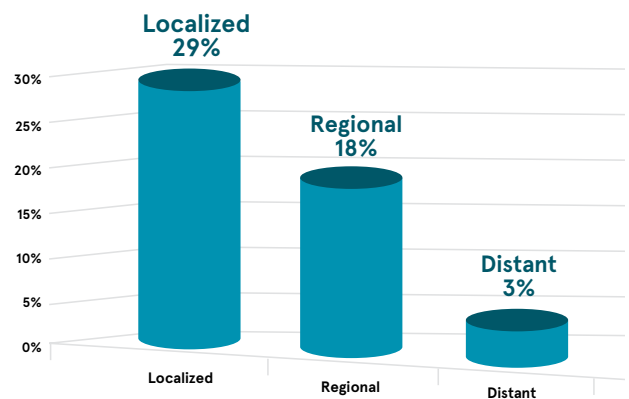
Research, based on previous outcomes of similar patients to you, provides the medical community with the likelihood of your survival rate. The survival rate is generally geared towards five years and is based on people who have the same type and stage of cancer including whether it has spread to other areas of the body. There are three general categories used to describe cancer and the survival rate:

- **Localized** cancer indicates that it has not spread outside the lungs.
- **Regional** indicates that the cancer has spread outside the lungs to nearby lymph nodes or other parts of the body.
- **Distant** indicates that the cancer has spread to distant parts of the body.

The Five-Year Survival Rate for Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer



The Five-Year Survival Rate for Small Cell Lung Cancer





Lung Cancer Stages by Type

The stage of your lung cancer describes how much the cancer has developed or spread in the body and will be different depending on which type of lung cancer you have.

Non-small cell lung cancer staging generally depends on the size of the lung mass and whether it has spread to lymph nodes or other parts of the body. There are five different stages from 0 to 4, with 0 being the least amount of cancer and stage 4 having cancer cells spread outside of the lungs.

Small cell lung cancer stages are determined by where the lung cancer is located in your body and if it has spread outside of your chest. The stages for small cell lung cancer are less specific. Limited stage means the cancer is only in one part of the chest. Extensive means that cancer has moved outside of the chest area, including the fluid around the lungs and/or lymph nodes.

Your oncologist will collect essential information to determine both the type and stage of your lung cancer, allowing them to develop a personalized treatment plan tailored to give you the best possible outcome.



“Lung cancer is much more treatable if it’s caught early. At RMCC, we have been encouraging patients and primary care physicians to get people back to cancer screening, to facilitate early detection and treatment.”

– Dr. Browning



Who Treats Lung Cancer?

Once you have a lung cancer diagnosis, it's time to schedule a visit with a medical oncologist. Their role is to design a personalized treatment plan for you alongside other specialists in order to determine the best path forward. Your medical oncologist is likely to lead your lung cancer treatment, but there are many other professionals involved in crafting the treatment plan that is most suitable for you.

The Typical Lung Cancer Treatment Team

Radiation oncologist: This is a doctor who specializes in treating cancer with radiation therapy. Receiving radiation treatment for your lung cancer may be part of your recommended treatment plan, particularly if your lung cancer has spread to certain lymph nodes in the center of your chest.

Surgeon: Surgery may be recommended for some patients who have healthy lungs and are diagnosed with early-stage lung cancer (stage 1 or 2). Not all individuals with a lung cancer diagnosis are candidates for surgery.

Advanced Practice Providers (APPs): Advanced practice providers are nurse practitioners or physician associates who work with the oncologists to provide care, education about treatments, and help with side effect management. On some visits, you might see only the APP. Feel free to tell them everything you would tell the oncologist.

Triage nurses: These nurses work with the medical oncologist and the APPs. They help with many facets of your treatment including keeping your treatment plan on track, side effect management, and determining whether you need urgent or emergent medical care. They also provide support for questions about side effects, patient and family concerns, and prescriptions.

Infusion nurses: These nurses administer chemotherapy, targeted therapy, and immunotherapy according to the treatment plan. They are with the patients in the cancer center's infusion room throughout their treatments and can help manage side effects that come up.

Radiation technicians: These team members assist in positioning you correctly for each radiation therapy session, administer the treatments, and provide support in managing any side effects.

Schedulers/Assistants: These staff members help set up appointments and provide other clerical support.

Social worker: Oncology social workers can help patients with the day-to-day challenges they may face with their mental and emotional health during cancer treatment. They are able to provide resources that can assist in the ways you need them most. Contact our social work team to sign up for our supportive care groups.

Patient financial counselor: Patient financial counselors offer assistance navigating financial resources and setting up payment plans.



It's really important that you feel comfortable talking to the staff at your cancer treatment center. They're going to give you a lot of information, and you need to have a line of communication that's clear and easy.



Should You Get a Second Opinion?

There are a few reasons why people want a second opinion. You may like the team you met with first but would like to hear another professional's opinion to see if they have a similar approach. That's a completely valid reason to seek a second opinion. It also exposes how each practice operates to see what might work better for you.

Other times, patients aren't comfortable with the team they met with initially. It's really important that you feel comfortable talking to the staff at your cancer treatment center. They're going to give you a lot of information, and you need to have a line of communication that is clear and easy. If you don't like your treatment team, you'll be less likely to ask questions, more likely to be frustrated, and all of these things greatly influence your mental and emotional health during treatment.

There is almost always time for you to seek a second opinion. And you shouldn't feel bad about getting a second opinion. Doctors understand that this is normal. The second opinion appointment is usually covered by insurance, and it will give you the peace of mind that you've got a treatment plan you feel is best for you.



Treatments for Lung Cancer

Small Cell Lung Cancer Treatments

Because SCLC is generally more aggressive, you should expect treatments to start quickly. Research has shown that radiation and chemotherapy for SCLC put about 25% of patients in remission. However, because this type of cancer is so likely to spread to other areas of the body such as the brain, some oncologists preventively treat the brain with radiation therapy.

Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer Treatments

Non-small cell lung cancer grows slower and is typically found at a later stage.

Surgery for Early Stage NSCLC Patients

If you have been diagnosed in stages 1 or 2, your doctor will likely suggest surgery for removal followed by other treatments to be sure all of the cancer cells are killed.

Treatments Used for All Stages of Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer

If the cancer is discovered at stages 3 or 4, then your treatment plan will likely start with chemotherapy and radiation.

New Options Available for Metastatic or Recurring Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer

There has been extensive research over the past decade that now offers new targeted therapies for NSCLC patients with metastatic (stage 4) non-small cell lung cancer. These patients have an analysis performed on tissue gathered during the biopsy to better understand the molecular drivers of their lung cancer. These are called biomarkers. If biomarkers are present, the oncologist will select specific drugs that “target” the identified genetic mutation, killing the cancer cells without harming the healthy cells.



Talk to your medical oncologist about whether biomarker testing will be performed.



Ways You Can Prepare for Lung Cancer Treatment

Cancer treatment is a team event. While the patient endures much of the physical, mental, and emotional strain, their family and friends play a crucial role in the treatment process, offering support and helping to ease the patient's journey.

The best thing you can do as a patient to help navigate the unknowns of cancer treatment is to prepare yourself and your loved ones as much as possible. Here are a few suggestions to keep in mind as you navigate the process.

Get Answers Prior to Treatment

Ask all the questions. Nothing is silly and your cancer care team is there to help you. Try to get a good understanding of what the treatment side effects will be. You may also want to ask non-medical questions related to day-to-day living. At RMCC, we have oncology social workers and nutrition experts on staff to help you with addressing questions outside of the medical treatments.

Participate in a Chemo Class

If chemotherapy will be a part of your treatment plan, there is important information you can learn from the cancer center beforehand. An advanced practice provider will guide you through the potential side effects of your treatments, offering strategies for managing them and preparing you to handle them effectively. You'll also learn about how to contact the practice if you need assistance after office hours. This is a good time to ask other questions about your treatment and what to expect.

Have Your Medications On-Hand for Side Effects

Make sure you pick up your supportive care and anti-nausea medicines from the pharmacy before starting treatment. Understand when and how to use them, and know when to contact your doctor. It's also a good idea to have a thermometer on hand in case you develop a fever, so you can inform the nurse of your temperature. A forehead thermometer is a simple and convenient option for most people.

Understand Your Financial Plan

Talk with the financial counselor at the practice to be sure you understand how your medical insurance will cover your treatments. At RMCC, you will typically talk to the financial counselor after your initial consultation but before treatments begin. This will give you a chance to develop a payment plan if needed.

If you haven't already, now is the time to stop smoking. If you need help, talk to your oncologist about options for a smoking cessation program.



Create a Healthy Living Space

- If you haven't already, now is the time to stop smoking. If you need help, talk to your oncologist about options for a smoking cessation program.
- Keep your air as clean as possible. This means no one in your household should smoke. Second-hand smoke is dangerous.
- Smoke and the chemical residue from smoking settles into the walls and upholstery in your home. Now is a good time to clean, or have someone help you wash down walls, clean upholstery including drapes, and wipe down hard surfaces to remove tobacco residue.

Prep for Your Time in the Cancer Center and the Side Effects of Treatments

- Start to moisturize more often with a lotion or cream such as Aveeno or CeraVe to help keep your skin softer. Cancer treatments can cause your skin to dry out, which can be incredibly uncomfortable.
- Purchase clothing that is soft and comfortable to help make chemotherapy days more manageable. Clothing with front buttons or styles that slip over your legs can also be helpful, as they make movement easier and accessing the port in your chest more convenient.
- Buy some fuzzy or fun socks so you can kick your feet up at home or at the cancer center during infusions.
- Do what you can to keep up with exercise and eat a healthy diet, especially before surgery. Sometimes you might not feel like it, but try to get up and get moving at least once a day.
- For radiation therapy days, wear clothes you can lie down in and be as comfortable as possible.



If You're Likely to Lose Your Hair...

- Your oncologist can tell you if you're likely to lose your hair from the treatments. You can talk to the team about using the Paxman Cooling System during chemotherapy to keep your scalp cool and help prevent hair loss.
- It may be a good idea to get your hair cut shorter before treatment begins so it's not as shocking when your hair starts to fall out.
- You can also use silk pillowcases to help keep your head cool while you sleep and reduce friction on your scalp.
- If you think you'd like to wear a wig, go before you lose your hair so the wig stylist can see how you wear your hair normally. They can help you choose a wig that would fit nicely and match your regular color and style.

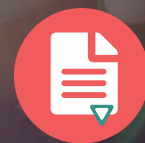
What Can You Do to Prepare for Surgery?

While not every lung cancer patient will have surgery, it is sometimes part of the treatment plan. If you're expecting surgery, then you may want to consider the following:

- Talk with your team to make sure you have a clear understanding of what you can expect before, during, and after your procedure.
- Ensure you know how you will get to and from the hospital or surgery center.
- Prepare some things to do at home. Consider stocking up on your favorite books – audio or in print – that you've wanted to read. Is there a TV series or two you'd like to binge-watch? How about a game on your phone? Give yourself permission not to do much after surgery, but you can keep your mind busy.

On the day of your infusion

We also have a list of things you may want to consider before your first chemo treatment.



**Click to Download
Pre-Infusion
Checklist**



Preparing Your Family for Your Treatments and Surgery

One of the most difficult things for many cancer patients is the worry they feel for their loved ones while they undergo cancer treatment. After all, you likely play a significant role in the lives of many people. If you find yourself consumed with concern, here are a few considerations to keep in mind:

- Help your family understand what is likely to happen after treatments and surgery so they know what to expect.
- Show them how to help you track your medication doses (you may want to write down a medication list to share), and give them a list of your doctors' phone numbers in case you start to feel ill and need them to contact the office for help.
- Consider creating a schedule for who will help with certain activities (cleaning the home, walking the dog, etc.).
- Prepare meals ahead of time and freeze them, so they are easily popped in the oven or microwave.
- Stock the fridge or freezer with favorite snacks – as healthy as possible. You might be able to have all of these things delivered to you by a grocery delivery service. Consider this as an option if you don't have someone who can easily pick out all of your favorite grocery store items.
- Have a plan in place to help with pets. Some people have their pets temporarily placed with family members or friends. If you keep your pet at home, make sure that their nails are trimmed (no accidental scratching). It might be easy to get a self-feeder that you only have to tend to every few days.

- Have an important conversation about what you'd like medical professionals to do if you need to be revived. If you have specific orders, it's best to put them in writing and tell your family. You may never need this, but it's a good idea just in case, especially before surgery.
- If you have younger children, it's important to reassure them and have a plan for how they're going to get to and from school and complete their homework. This is especially important if you're normally the person who helps with these things.

Ways Your Friends and Family Can Help

It's common for your friends and family to extend the offer to help with phrases such as, "Let me know if there's anything I can do." While they certainly mean that, they usually don't know exactly how they can help. That's why it's important to consider what you may actually find helpful from friends and family who offer their time and company.

Some ideas may include:

- **Rides:** Treatments are mentally and physically taxing, so having rides to and from appointments is a good idea.
- **Meals:** It may be a good idea to use a sign-up system so friends and family know which days you need meals. You can also include any dietary restrictions or preferences.
- **Pets:** If you have pets in the home, consider having a family member or friend help with them, even if it's just coming over and playing with the pets so they get some attention.
- **Cleaning or running errands:** Consider having loved ones help clean up around your home or run necessary errands for you while you're unable to.
- **Help with young children:** Children will still need to attend school and get to their activities. Allow your support network to help with your young children while you recover.
- **Company at home:** Visiting with friends and family can be a good mental distraction. Just ask that anyone who visits self-checks for symptoms of COVID, the flu, or even a cold before arriving. Your immune system will be low during treatment, so it's best to stay away from anyone who might be sick. If your family member or friend is ill, consider a video or phone call.
- **Company during infusion room treatments:** Treatments can take some time, so having a friend or family member with you during that time can be helpful. Make sure to check with the cancer center to see if they allow guests in the infusion room with you.





Taking Care of Your Mental and Emotional Health During Lung Cancer Treatment

Emotional changes, including depression and anxiety, are common during your lung cancer treatment journey. It's important to monitor your mental health and reach out to your care team if you notice any shifts in your well-being. As you advocate for yourself, finding ways to relax and ease your mind is crucial. Here are a few tips to help support your mental well-being.

Find Mental Relief

It's important to take a break from thinking about cancer each day to give your mind some relief. Consider activities that provide a distraction, such as spending time with family and friends, working on puzzles, or listening to calming music or meditation sounds. Reflect on what brings you moments of peace and make time for those activities as much as possible.

If you had a glass of wine or another alcoholic drink as part of your relaxation process before cancer, talk to your doctor about whether that's safe to use during cancer treatment.



Watch for Signs of Depression

It's important to know the signs of depression as some people experience it throughout their treatment process. Depression can have many symptoms, including:

- Ongoing sadness
- Anxiety
- Indifference
- Low motivation
- Loss of interest in activities
- Sleep disturbances
- Fatigue – feeling like you just can't get up and do anything or even get out of bed.
- Loss of appetite
- Excessive hunger
- Lack of concentration
- Weight fluctuations
- Thoughts of suicide

Please note that signs of depression can be different for each person. Certain signs, such as fatigue or weight changes, may be side effects of treatment. While anxiety may also be a sign of depression, it may present itself more after treatment is complete due to concerns about recurrence.

Resources to Help with Depression

If you're experiencing signs of depression, know that there are members of your care team who can help. Speak with your oncologist or the nurses you see during treatment, as they can connect you with a social worker experienced in supporting patients through the emotional challenges of cancer treatment.

Your oncologist and care team are here to assist as much as you need, offering support for your mental and emotional well-being by addressing your unique needs. Don't hesitate to lean on them for help whenever you need it.



Community Programs that Help Support Mental Health

There are opportunities for cancer patients throughout Colorado (or wherever you may live) to participate in complementary therapies such as yoga, art classes, music classes, and other types of activities that are designed to keep cancer patients' minds, and in some cases, bodies engaged. Talk to your nurse navigator or social worker about what's available where you live.



The Rocky Mountain Cancer Centers Team is Here for You

The Rocky Mountain Cancer Centers team, located throughout Colorado, understands the challenges you're facing. We are here to not only provide the expert medical treatments you need to overcome lung cancer, but we're also here to help you with the mental, emotional, and social challenges that come with this diagnosis.

Request an appointment at one of our locations near you.

Aurora | 303-418-7600
Boulder | 303-385-2000
Centennial | 303-805-7744
Colorado Springs - Penrose Pavilion | 719-577-2555
Colorado Springs - St. Peregrine Pavilion | 719-577-2555
Denver - Midtown | 303-388-4876
Denver - Rose Medical Center | 303-321-0302
Englewood - Swedish Medical Center | 303-740-8200
Lakewood | 303-430-2700
Littleton | 303-730-4700
Lone Tree - Sky Ridge Medical Center | 303-925-0700
Longmont | 303-684-1900
Pueblo | 719-296-6000
Thornton | 303-386-7622



Visit us at RockyMountainCancerCenters.com for more information about lung cancer treatment and to request an appointment.