Frequently Asked Questions:
Treatment and Biomarker Testing in NSCLC

Not all non–small cell lung cancer (NSCLC) is the same. Some tumors are positive for biomarkers. The only way to learn if your NSCLC has any biomarkers is through biomarker testing.

Knowledge is power. By learning more about the biomarkers specific to your NSCLC, you can be the strongest champion for your own care.

NSCLC Treatments

What are my treatment options?

Chemotherapy, radiation, surgery, targeted therapies, and immunotherapy are the main treatment options for NSCLC. However, a number of factors can affect which treatments will be best for you.

Factors that can affect treatment include your cancer's particular type and stage, as well as unique changes to your cancer cells, called biomarkers. Investigational or new treatment combinations may also be available through clinical trials. You and your doctor should discuss whether clinical trials are an option for you.

What is targeted therapy?

Targeted therapies are treatments that are available for specific types of NSCLC. These treatments target specific biomarkers, known as driver mutations, that cause cancer growth. The only way to know if you may be eligible for targeted therapy is through biomarker testing.

What is immunotherapy?

Immunotherapy is a type of treatment available for NSCLC. Immunotherapy helps your body's own immune system fight the cancer in your body. The biomarker PD-L1 may help inform if immunotherapy may be an appropriate treatment for you.

Do I start treatment right away?

When possible, medical experts agree that it is important for people with NSCLC and their health care team to wait until all biomarker testing results are available before making a shared decision on a treatment plan. The use of targeted therapies may lead to better outcomes in people whose NSCLC is positive for certain biomarkers, known as driver mutations.

Also, medical experts have found that some NSCLC caused by driver mutations may not respond as well to less-targeted options like immunotherapy. Typically, medical experts recommend that immunotherapy only be used when targeted therapy is not an option. When possible, waiting for all biomarker testing results may allow you and your health care team to better personalize your treatment to your specific lung cancer.

What are my options if I don't have a biomarker?

Even if the tumor in your body does not have any biomarkers that can be matched to an available targeted therapy or to a clinical trial, comprehensive biomarker testing can still help you and your health care team decide on the right treatment for you. There are treatment options for NSCLC. Speak to your doctor about the best treatment options for you.

Biomarker Testing

How do I know if I will need biomarker testing?

Your health care team may order specific tests for you, including biomarker testing. Biomarker testing helps your health care team to gather as much information as possible about your type of lung cancer. Medical experts recommend biomarker testing for all people with advanced NSCLC. Biomarker testing can help determine your eligibility for potentially effective treatments.

What is comprehensive biomarker testing?

There are two common approaches to testing for driver mutation biomarkers. Single biomarker tests look for only 1 specific driver mutation in a tumor sample. Comprehensive biomarker tests look for multiple mutations at the same time on the same tumor sample by next-generation sequencing.

There are more than 8 driver mutations recommended for biomarker testing in NSCLC. So, comprehensive biomarker testing can more efficiently check for all of the recommended driver mutations at one time. Comprehensive biomarker testing may also identify other mutations that may help determine if you are eligible for a clinical trial.

Why is comprehensive biomarker testing so important?

Comprehensive biomarker testing is important because it may help identify a treatment that may be right for you. Biomarker testing helps identify if you have any biomarkers that may be treated with an approved targeted therapy or if you are eligible for participation in a clinical trial.

Studies have shown that people with NSCLC who are treated with a targeted therapy based on their unique biomarker may have better outcomes than those who are not.

Also, medical experts have found that some NSCLC caused by driver mutations may not respond as well to less-targeted options like immunotherapy. Start by talking to your health care team about comprehensive biomarker testing to identify treatment options for your specific type of lung cancer.

How is comprehensive biomarker testing done?

Comprehensive biomarker testing can be done using either a tumor sample from surgery or biopsy, or in some cases a blood sample (liquid biopsy). After the biopsy or blood sample is collected, it is sent to a laboratory for testing.

How long does it take to get results from comprehensive biomarker testing?

After comprehensive biomarker testing has been ordered, the test results are generally available within 2 to 4 weeks. Liquid biopsy results may take less time. It is very important to confirm with your health care team when you should expect to receive the results.

What are the costs of comprehensive biomarker testing?

Biomarker testing is often covered by private insurance (like HMOs or PPOs), Medicare, or some Medicaid plans. And you may be able to get help paying for it. Talk with your health care team or contact your insurance company to find out more.