

Thymus Cancer: Risk Factors



What is a risk factor?

A risk factor is anything that may increase your chance of having a disease. Risk factors for a certain type of cancer might include smoking, diet, family history, or many other things. The exact cause of someone's cancer may not be known. But risk factors can make it more likely for a person to have cancer.

Things you should know about risk factors for cancer:

- Risk factors can increase a person's risk, but they don't always cause the disease.
- Some people with risk factors never develop cancer. Other people can develop cancer and have no risk factors.
- Some risk factors are very well known. But there is ongoing research about risk factors for many types of cancer.

Some risk factors, such as family history, may not be in your control. But others may be things you can change. Knowing the risk factors can help you make choices that might lower your risk. For example, if an unhealthy diet is a risk factor, you may choose to eat healthy foods. If excess weight is a risk factor, you may decide to try to lose weight.

Who is at risk for thymus cancer?

Anyone can get thymus cancer. Fortunately, this is a rare cancer. There aren't any known specific lifestyle, inherited, or environmental risk factors for thymus cancer. There are very few factors linked to an increased risk for thymus cancer. These include:

- **Older age.** The risk of thymoma, a type of thymus cancer, goes up with age. It's very rare in children and adults. Unlike thymoma, thymic carcinoma occurs over a wider age range and includes adolescents.
- **Race and ethnicity.** Thymomas are more common in Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders and African Americans compared to other racial groups in the U.S.
- **Certain autoimmune diseases.** Sometimes people with certain autoimmune diseases, such as myasthenia gravis, red cell aplasia, or hypogammaglobulinemia, are later found to have thymomas. It's thought that the cancer is most likely the cause of these conditions (called paraneoplastic syndromes), rather than the other way around. But sometimes symptoms from these conditions allow a thymoma to be found at an early stage.

What are your risk factors?

If you are concerned about thymus cancer, talk with your healthcare provider about your risk factors. Unfortunately, the known risk factors for thymus cancer are not under your control. But if you are at increased risk, being aware of possible symptoms might help find thymus cancer early, when it could be easier to treat.

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