

Title:

Mesothelioma - Catch It Early To Avoid Big Trouble

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Summary:

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Article Body:

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****What is Mesothelioma?****

Mesothelioma is a rare form of cancer in which malignant (cancerous) cells are found in the mesothelium, a protective sac that covers most of the body's internal organs. The organs most commonly affected are the lungs, heart and abdominal organs. The most common form of Mesothelioma is Pleural Mesothelioma -- cancer of the lung lining. But cancerous cells are also found in the lining of the abdominal cavity (the peritoneum) and the lining around the heart (the pericardium).

****What causes Mesothelioma?****

Mesothelioma is almost always caused by exposure to asbestos. Asbestos is often

found in building materials used before the mid 1970's. In addition, materials such as pipes, boiler insulation, floor, ceiling and roof tiles may contain asbestos. It is believed that even insignificant exposure to asbestos in environments such as asbestos mills, mines, shipping yards, some older Navy ships or even in patient's homes can result in mesothelioma. In many cases mesothelioma does not occur for decades after initial exposure to this cancer-causing asbestos. 2000-3000 cases of mesothelioma per year are currently being diagnosed. Family members of workers exposed to asbestos can also contract this disease through exposure to the worker's clothing. Like many other cancers, smoking greatly increases the risk of contracting mesothelioma.

****How much asbestos exposure will cause Mesothelioma?****

Generally, the probability of developing this form of cancer is directly related to the length of time you are exposed to asbestos. The health risk also increases with the intensity of the exposure to asbestos.

However, an exposure of as little as one or two months can result in mesothelioma 30 or 40 years later. At the age of 48, Canadian Member of Parliament Chuck Strahl, was recently diagnosed with mesothelioma and traces the cause back to changing brake pads on logging equipment after he graduated from high school. Strahl's case is a good example of the fact that Mesothelioma has a latency period of anywhere from 20 to 50 years. Like thousands of others he developed the disease long after his exposure to asbestos.

****What are the symptoms of Mesothelioma?****

Mesothelioma is a very subtle form of cancer providing only a few noticeable symptoms until it becomes extremely advanced. 75% of all mesothelioma cases are Pleural mesothelioma - cancer of the lung lining. This type of cancer causes shortness of breath and/or chronic coughing that can easily be mistaken for allergies or a common cold. Mesothelioma is often discovered by accident when patients are being examined for these common symptoms. Other symptoms of pleural mesothelioma may include: chest pain, shortness of breath, chronic coughing that worsens over time, fatigue, wheezing, lung infection, hoarseness, weight loss, difficulty swallowing, chest or abdominal pain or blood in the phlegm from the lungs when coughing

Peritoneal mesothelioma affects the lining around the stomach and intestines and can be just as dangerous and deadly. Symptoms of Peritoneal mesothelioma include: pain or swelling in the abdomen, weight loss, bowel obstruction (blockage in the large or small intestines), anemia (reduced number of red blood cells) , and fever.

The onset of Mesothelioma is usually quite slow. Patients will begin to experience symptoms such as lower back pain and chest pain. Unfortunately, once Mesothelioma develops, it quickly becomes aggressive and treatment must be sought immediately.

****Can Mesothelioma be treated?****

Unfortunately, by the time most infected people become aware they have mesothelioma it has ceased being dormant and becomes extremely aggressive. Once it is no longer dormant, this type of cancer can travel quickly, and this makes it almost impossible to stop.

While there are treatments that are available in order to keep the patient comfortable, there is currently no cure for Mesothelioma, and as many as 75% of those who develop the disease will lose their life within one year. The remainder may last for up to an additional six months. Among the treatments that are used in order to reduce the effects of the disease are oxygen, postural drainage and pain killers. A wide range of treatment approaches are being tested, ranging from attempts to fortify the body's natural immune system to gene therapy which tries to attack the problem at the DNA level to homeopathy, herbs and acupuncture. But none have yet been shown to be very effective once the disease reaches the aggressive stage.

Given the generally poor prognosis for people who do not catch the disease in time, early detection is the best defence against Mesothelioma. If you have worked in an industry such as construction or suspect that you may have been exposed to asbestos, be alert for symptoms and contact your doctor immediately. Like all forms of cancer, detecting Mesothelioma at the earliest stage possible greatly increases your chances for survival.