



What you need to know about...

Pulmonary Fibrosis

Pulmonary Fibrosis is a disease that causes scarring of lung tissue. As scars thicken, lungs slowly lose their ability to move oxygen into the bloodstream, which means they cannot deliver oxygen to vital organs. There are many types of pulmonary fibrosis, each of which has a different cause. In most cases, health care providers cannot identify what is causing the fibrosis. When the cause is unknown, the disease is called idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF). Approximately 50,000 new cases of IPF are diagnosed each year, and approximately 200,000 Americans currently have the disease.

What causes pulmonary fibrosis?

The exact causes of pulmonary fibrosis are not known. Researchers think that something inside or outside of the lungs continuously attacks the lungs. These attacks create scarring in the air sacs, which makes it harder for oxygen to pass through them. Factors that may increase your risk for pulmonary fibrosis include:

- Cigarette smoking
- Viral infections
- Environmental pollutants
- Use of certain medicines
- Gastroesophageal reflux disease
- Genetics

What are the signs and symptoms of pulmonary fibrosis?

The signs and symptoms of pulmonary fibrosis develop over time. The most common include:

- Shortness of breath
- Dry, hacking cough
- Rapid, shallow breathing
- Weight loss
- Fatigue
- Widening and rounding of finger tips or toes (called clubbing)
- Aching muscles and joints

How is pulmonary fibrosis diagnosed?

Pulmonary fibrosis is diagnosed by medical history, physical exam and the results of certain tests that may be recommended by your health care provider. These may include a chest x-ray, a high-resolution computed tomography (CT) scan (similar to an x-ray, but produces more detailed pictures) and spirometry (measures air movement in and out of your lungs).

How is pulmonary fibrosis treated?

The treatment options for pulmonary fibrosis include medicines, oxygen therapy, pulmonary rehabilitation and lung transplants. Scarring cannot be removed, so treatment goals include preventing more lung scarring, relieving symptoms, and improving your quality of life. It is essential to diagnose and treat pulmonary fibrosis as early as possible.

How can I manage my pulmonary fibrosis?

Because there is no cure for pulmonary fibrosis, symptoms may worsen over time. It is important to stop smoking and avoid secondhand smoke. Also, physical activity can help maintain and strengthen lung function. It is very important to receive ongoing medical care and follow a treatment plan as advised by your health care provider.