

Early COPD detection could help lung cancer diagnosis

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Early screening of patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) may help to detect lung cancer at an earlier stage, according to a new study.

The research, published online today in the [European Respiratory Journal](#), suggests that if COPD can be detected at an earlier stage, this will also aid the early detection of [lung cancer](#).

The news comes on World COPD Day, which aims to improve awareness of the condition and care of people with COPD around the world.

COPD and lung cancer are major worldwide [health problems](#) that are on the increase. According to the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO), COPD is the fourth biggest killer in the world and lung cancer the seventh.

Although scientists have known that these two diseases are linked, it has only been in the last decade that they have begun to understand the genetic interactions that connect the two diseases.

In the new study, the researchers sought to review a number of research papers from the last 20 years that looked at how lung cancer was associated with COPD and how important early detection of COPD was for lung cancer surveillance.

Their analysis revealed that COPD patients are more likely to develop lung cancer compared to current or former smokers with normal lung function. Approximately 1% of patients with COPD develop lung cancer each year, while only 0.2% of patients with normal lung function develop the disease. This represents a 5-fold increased risk of lung cancer amongst COPD patients.

The results also suggested that testing the lung function of former and active [smokers](#) could help to identify COPD at an early stage. If COPD is identified, these patients should then be monitored by CT scan to help with the early detection of lung cancer.

Yasuo Sekine, lead author of the research from the Tokyo Women's Medical University, said: "Both COPD and lung cancer have high [mortality rates](#) and a serious [economic impact](#) worldwide. Early detection and intervention for both diseases are critical. The findings from our analysis suggest that early detection of COPD in addition to lung cancer screening for these patients could be an effective detection technique for lung cancer. However, further research is still needed to determine the selection criteria for COPD and lung cancer screening."

Monica Fletcher, Chair of the European Lung Foundation and Chief Executive of Education for Health, said: "Early detection of both COPD and lung cancer is vital if we are to make steps towards combatting these diseases. Millions of people have COPD, yet it is often undetected. People frequently ignore the symptoms of lung disease and leave it too late before going to the doctor. This research highlights the need for routine [lung function](#) tests, known as spirometry, to help improve quality of life and identify other conditions that could be present."

Professor Klaus Rabe, President of the ERS, said: "This study highlights the link between chronic non-communicable diseases, such as COPD and lung cancer. It reminds us that we can no longer consider these

diseases in isolation, but rather how they impact on each other and on the patient. The European Respiratory Roadmap, which was launched last month, outlines the need for greater coordination between medical specialists to improve patient care. On World COPD Day, we would also urge European governments to improve early detection of respiratory diseases, such as COPD."

Provided by European Lung Foundation

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