

Lung Cancer Clinical Trial Glossary of Terms



General Lung Cancer Clinical Trial Terms (A–Z)

ALK (Anaplastic Lymphoma Kinase)

A gene that may be altered in some lung cancers. If present, targeted therapy may be an option.

Active Surveillance

Closely monitoring cancer without starting treatment right away. Also called 'watch and wait.'

Adenocarcinoma

The most common type of non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC). It usually begins in the outer areas of the lung.

BRAF

A gene that may be mutated in some lung cancers. Targeted therapy may be available.

Biomarker

A gene, protein, or molecular change in your tumor that helps guide treatment decisions.

Biopsy

A procedure where a small sample of tissue is removed and tested for cancer.

Brain Metastases (Brain Mets)

Cancer that has spread from the lung to the brain.

CT Scan (Computed Tomography)

A detailed imaging test that creates cross-sectional pictures of the body.

Chemotherapy (Chemo)

Medication that kills fast-growing cancer cells.

Clinical Trial

A research study that tests new treatments, combinations, or new ways to improve cancer care.

Control Group

The group in a clinical trial that receives the current standard treatment.

Double-Blind Study

A study in which neither the patient nor the doctor knows which treatment is being given.

ECOG Performance Status

A scale that measures how active and physically able a patient is.

EGFR (Epidermal Growth Factor Receptor)

A gene that may be altered in lung cancer. Targeted treatments are available for EGFR mutations.

Eligibility Criteria

The rules that determine who can join a clinical trial.

FDA (Food and Drug Administration)

The U.S. agency that reviews and approves new cancer treatments.

Immunotherapy (IO)

Treatment that helps your immune system recognize and attack cancer cells.

Informed Consent

A document explaining the risks, benefits, and details of a clinical trial. You must sign it before joining.

Infusion

Medication given through an IV (intravenous line).

Investigational Drug

A treatment that is still being studied and not yet fully approved.

KRAS

A gene that may be altered in lung cancer. Certain targeted therapies are available.

Line of Treatment

The order in which treatments are given (first-line, second-line, etc.).

MET

A gene that may be altered in lung cancer and may qualify for targeted therapy.

MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging)

A scan that creates detailed images of organs and tissues.

Metastatic (Stage 4)

Cancer that has spread to other parts of the body.

Molecular / Genomic Testing

Testing a tumor for genetic mutations to help guide treatment decisions.

NED (No Evidence of Disease)

Scans show no visible signs of cancer.

NSCLC (Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer)

The most common type of lung cancer.

OS (Overall Survival)

The length of time patients live after starting treatment.

PD-L1 (Programmed Death-Ligand 1)

A protein tested to determine whether immunotherapy may be effective.

PET Scan (Positron Emission Tomography)

An imaging test that helps detect cancer activity.

PFS (Progression-Free Survival)

The amount of time cancer does not grow after treatment.

Phase 1 Trial

A study that tests safety and determines the correct dose.

Phase 2 Trial

A study that tests whether a treatment works.

Phase 3 Trial

A study that compares a new treatment to the current standard of care.

Placebo

An inactive treatment. In cancer trials, patients usually receive at least standard care.

Principal Investigator (PI)

The lead doctor responsible for a clinical trial.

Progression

When cancer grows or spreads.

RECIST (Response Evaluation Criteria in Solid Tumors)

A standardized way doctors measure how tumors respond to treatment.

RET

A gene that may be altered in lung cancer and treated with targeted therapy.

ROS1

A gene rearrangement that may respond to targeted therapy.

Randomized

Participants are assigned by chance to different treatment groups.

SCLC (Small Cell Lung Cancer)

A faster-growing type of lung cancer.

Scanxiety

The anxiety or stress patients feel before, during, or after scans.

Stable Disease

Cancer that is not shrinking but is also not growing.

Standard of Care

The best proven treatment currently available.

Survivorship

Living with, through, or beyond cancer.

Targeted Therapy

Treatment that attacks specific genetic mutations in cancer cells.

Tumor Board

A group of doctors who review cases and recommend treatment plans.

Watch and Wait

Monitoring cancer closely before starting treatment.

Common Survivor & Patient Slang Terms

Cancer-versary

The anniversary of a diagnosis date or major milestone.

Chemo Brain

Mental fog, memory issues, or difficulty concentrating during or after treatment.

New Normal

Adjusting to life after diagnosis or treatment.

Port

Short for port-a-cath, a small device implanted under the skin to give IV treatments more easily.

Roller Coaster

Describes the emotional ups and downs of cancer treatment.

Warrior

A term some patients use to describe themselves as fighters (not everyone prefers this term).

Small Cell Lung Cancer (SCLC) Specific Terms

Extensive-Stage SCLC

Small cell lung cancer that has spread beyond one side of the chest.

Limited-Stage SCLC

Small cell lung cancer that is confined to one side of the chest and may be treated with combined chemotherapy and radiation.

Platinum-Based Chemotherapy

A common first-line treatment for small cell lung cancer, often using cisplatin or carboplatin.

Prophylactic Cranial Irradiation (PCI)

Preventive radiation to the brain to reduce the risk of cancer spreading there.

Refractory SCLC

Small cell lung cancer that does not respond to initial treatment.

Relapsed SCLC

Small cell lung cancer that returns after initial treatment.

This is not a conclusive list of all lung cancer terms, and you are not expected to understand all of them immediately. It is okay to ask your doctor to explain things in plain language.