MESOTHELIOMA

Questions & Answers
A Comprehensive Guide to Mesothelioma

A cancer diagnosis of any kind is devastating to a family, but some are particularly crushing. While many cancer patients have a fighting chance at survival, people diagnosed with mesothelioma, which is incurable, look for ways to live the last years of their life to the fullest. This guide may help with that.

Mesothelioma, an extremely rare form of cancer, is caused by the inhalation of asbestos, a mineral that was prominently used in manufacturing for much of the 20th century. Today, asbestos has been phased out of use in most products, but 2,000 to 3,000 people are still diagnosed with it in the U.S. every year. (And, shockingly enough, asbestos is still legal in this country.)

Part of what makes mesothelioma so unique is the amount of time the disease takes to fully develop. For some workers who handled asbestos, the latency period can extend up to 50 years, leaving them with a cancer diagnosis well past retirement age. Most cases do not take that long to develop, though, and in some instances it can take just 20 years or less for symptoms to begin presenting themselves.

**TYPES**

There are four types of mesothelioma, but the type that affects the lung accounts for the majority of mesothelioma cases, according to the American Cancer Society. Each type of mesothelioma is named for the mesothelium where the tumor forms. The mesothelium is a special layer of cells found around most organs in the body that acts like a lining for the organ.

The four types of mesothelioma are:

**Pleural Mesothelioma:** This is the most common form of mesothelioma, and it affects the mesothelium of the lungs. Pleural mesothelioma accounts for 75 percent of all mesothelioma cases, the ACS says.

**Peritoneal Mesothelioma:** This is the second-most common form of mesothelioma, and it affects the mesothelium of the abdomen. Peritoneal mesothelioma accounts for 10 to 20 percent of all mesothelioma diagnoses.

**Pericardial Mesothelioma:** This is the third-most common form of mesothelioma, and it affects the mesothelium of the heart. Pericardial mesothelioma is very rare and accounts for just a small portion of all mesothelioma diagnoses each year.

**Tunica Vaginalis:** This is the least common form of mesothelioma, and it affects the mesothelium of the testicles. Tunica vaginalis is extremely rare, accounting for less than one percent of all mesothelioma diagnoses each year, according to a 2015 study published in the Singapore Journal of Medicine.
Common symptoms for pericardial mesothelioma include:

- Abdominal pain
- Swelling or fluid in the abdomen
- Unintentional weight loss
- Nausea and vomiting
- Constipation

Displaying one or some of these symptoms does not mean a person has mesothelioma, and if there is no history of working with asbestos it is unlikely that a person has developed the disease. However, if a person is experiencing some of these symptoms and has a history of working with asbestos, they may want to consider scheduling a doctor’s appointment.
To diagnose someone with mesothelioma, doctors must do more than listen to people take deep breaths with their stethoscopes. It is more likely that a doctor will place their patients through a battery of tests before issuing a mesothelioma diagnosis.

The likely steps a doctor will take diagnosing someone with mesothelioma include:

**Physical Exam:** Because it is so rare, mesothelioma is unlikely to be a doctor’s first thought when a patient comes in complaining of the symptoms mentioned above. However, through a physical exam a doctor may notice a buildup of fluid around the lungs, heart, abdomen or groin, depending on where the tumor has formed. A doctor will not issue a mesothelioma diagnosis based on a physical exam, but it may encourage them to do more tests, according to the ACS.

**Imaging Tests:** Following a physical exam and conversation about the possibility of past exposure to asbestos, a doctor will want to do imaging tests of a person’s insides. Depending on the tumor suspected of developing, the doctor may want to do some combination of a chest x-ray, CT scan, echocardiogram, PET scan, and MRI.

**Blood Tests:** People with mesothelioma often have higher levels of osteopontin or soluble mesothelin-related peptides in their blood, according to the ACS. A blood test will reveal this, but blood tests alone do not provide sufficient proof that a person has mesothelioma. Rather, they provide evidence that makes a diagnosis more likely. To confirm a diagnosis, something else must be done.

**Biopsy:** No mesothelioma diagnosis can be confirmed without a biopsy of the organ tissue affected by mesothelioma. There a few different ways to extract the tissue, and a doctor will choose the type of biopsy to do based on the type of mesothelioma they suspect.

**How Does Someone Get Mesothelioma?**

Mesothelioma is a very rare type of cancer, and only about 3,000 people are diagnosed with it each year, but how do they get it? The answer is actually very simple — asbestos.

**WHAT IS ASBESTOS AND HOW DOES IT CAUSE MESOTHELIOMA?**

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral that that was prominently used in construction and commercial industry for much of the 20th century. It was widely used because it is nearly fire retardant, making it the perfect material for insulation. Consequently, many workers were exposed to the asbestos particles floating in the air, which were released when the mineral was cut, sanded, or scuffed.
The asbestos particles floating around were then inhaled by workers, who were unaware of the potential danger. The particles settled deep in their lungs, where they are difficult to expel, and sat for decades slowly forming into mesothelioma.

In some cases, even the spouses of workers were exposed to asbestos. This is because of a phenomenon called “secondhand exposure,” in which spouses inhaled asbestos brought home on clothing worn at work.

Surprisingly, some people were aware that asbestos could cause cancer as early as the beginning of the 20th century. Yet, it wasn’t until the late ‘60s that the dangers of asbestos became well known to the public. Studies began appearing in the ‘50s and ‘60s about the dangers of asbestos, culminating in the first asbestos lawsuit in 1969. Just a year later the government began decades of action on asbestos, including the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s attempted ban on the substance in 1989.

However, that ban never stuck because of fierce opposition from the asbestos industry. The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals vacated the EPA ban in 1991, and today small amounts of asbestos are still used in a handful of products, according to the EPA.

Some products that may still include small amounts of asbestos include:

- Cement corrugated sheet
- Cement flat sheet
- Clothing
- Pipeline wrap
- Roofing felt
- Vinyl floor tile
- Cement shingle
- Millboard
- Cement pipe
- Automatic transmission components
- Clutch facings
- Friction materials
- Disk brake pads
- Drum brake linings
- Brake blocks
- Gaskets
- Non-roofing coatings
- Roof coating
Asbestos was used in many industries for a very long time, but its use was more prevalent in some industries than others.

**Industries where it was used most include:**

- Shipbuilding and repair
- Construction
- Asbestos mining and milling
- Power plants
- Textile manufacturing
- Glass manufacturing
- Electronics manufacturing
- Chemical manufacturing
- Metal manufacturing
- Aerospace manufacturing
- Automotive manufacturing
- Pharmaceutical manufacturing
- Automobile repair
- Paper and pulp manufacturing
- Firefighting
- Food processing
- Agriculture
- Railroads

**Individual occupations with a high risk of asbestos exposure include:**

- Insulation workers
- Electricians
- Carpenters
- Drywall workers
- Cement workers
- Teachers
- Painters
- Motor vehicle and aircraft mechanics
- Maintenance mechanics
- Machinists
- Navy yard workers
The U.S. is home to the most cases of mesothelioma in the world each year, but just five states contribute the majority of all U.S. cases.

One explanation for this is geography. People who worked in shipyards are among the most likely to develop mesothelioma, and as a result coastal states have higher rates of mesothelioma than many land-locked states, according to a 2015 study published in the International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Health.

The five states that average the most mesothelioma diagnoses a year are:

- California
- Florida
- New York
- Texas
- Pennsylvania

Although not as significant as the top five, there is another group of states where mesothelioma is developed at a higher rate than the rest of the country, according to the study published in IJOEH. These states include: New Jersey, Massachusetts, West Virginia, Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Washington state.

Living With Mesothelioma

Many people who are diagnosed with mesothelioma are near the age of retirement, and after decades of hard work they are forced to begin a new job – fighting cancer. This is always a devastating turn of events, but there are still things that can be done to maintain a relatively high quality of life, depending on the cancer's stage at the time of diagnosis.

PROGNOSIS

Even though mesothelioma is eventually always fatal, people diagnosed with it can still live for years, and in some case even decades after their diagnosis. However, the prognosis is different in each case, and factors such as the cancer's stage, a person's health, their age, and the symptoms they are displaying at the time of diagnoses, among other factors, can affect the prognosis.

The stages of the most common form of mesothelioma, pleural mesothelioma, are:

**Stage I:** Cancer is confined to one side of the body, and damage is limited to the lining of one lung. Because the cancer has not spread, patients with Stage I mesothelioma have the best prognosis. The median survival rate is 21 months.
Stage II: Cancer is confined to one side of the body, but may have spread past the lining and into the diaphragm, nearby lymph nodes, and even the lung itself. The median survival rate is 19 months.

Stage III: Cancer is confined to one side of the body but has invaded the lung and/or spread to nearby organs like the diaphragm, lymph nodes, and the protective lining of the heart. The median survival rate is 16 months.

Stage IV: Cancer is no longer confined to one side of the body, and other tumors have likely grown in other parts of the body. Cancer cells and tumors may have spread to the chest wall, diaphragm, lining of the heart, and lymph nodes all over the body. The median life expectancy is 12 months.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

Although mesothelioma does not have a long median survival rate, there are treatment options that can extend a person's life, according to the ACS. The type of treatment options a person is eligible for depend on their stage of cancer and whether or not their cancer is resectable – or removeable.

Generally, mesothelioma at Stages I, II, or III is considered resectable because the cancer has not yet spread significantly. Chemotherapy and radiation treatment may then be used to “clean out” the remaining cancer cells from the body following surgery.

For people diagnosed with Stage IV mesothelioma, the list of treatment options is much smaller. Surgery is likely not an option because the cancer has spread to the point that it would be impossible to remove enough of the tumor or tumors to make a difference. Still, chemotherapy and radiation can be used to fight the cancer and can even give someone longer to live.

Ultimately, each person has a different experience with mesothelioma, and they will need to develop a custom treatment plan with their doctor. Once under the treatment of a doctor, patients should not introduce new treatments before consulting with their physician.

SUPPORT GROUPS

Receiving any sort of cancer diagnosis – let alone one for mesothelioma – can be traumatizing. No one should have to go through it alone, and friends and family can help provide support.

Group therapy and one-on-one counseling are also recommended by the ACS, to provide an outlet for topics like death and dying that may be difficult to discuss with people who are close to the patient, like friends and family. It also provides a safe environment for a person to share how they are feeling with people who better understand what they are going through.

There is no single, correct type of counseling a mesothelioma patient should enter, but it is important that they choose some form to better cope with the emotional effects of their diagnosis.
What Legal Options Does a Mesothelioma Patient Have?
For decades, companies knew that the mineral could cause cancer and yet it continued to be mined, sold, and used for manufacturing. This needlessly exposed workers in a variety of industries to the potential for afflicting a fatal disease.

As a result, there are well established legal options available to mesothelioma patients and their loved ones that could result in financial compensation.

HOW CAN HIRING AN ATTORNEY HELP?
Mesothelioma claims are complex, because of the unique circumstances of the disease and the various ways to seek compensation, depending on a sufferer's situation. By hiring an experienced mesothelioma attorney, patients get someone who will pursue all avenues of compensation available to their clients.

In some cases, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly when a person was exposed to asbestos, but a mesothelioma attorney will investigate a person's employment history and gather the information required to file a potentially effective mesothelioma claim. After the initial meeting and investigation, a good mesothelioma attorney will keep their client involved as much as the client wants.

The attorneys at ClassAction.com have helped hundreds of mesothelioma patients from across the country recover millions of dollars. Suffering from mesothelioma is challenging enough, and pursuing financial compensation shouldn't add to that burden. The attorneys at ClassAction.com strive to make the legal process as simple as possible for their clients and won't accept payment unless they win the case.

For experienced attorneys that won't make pursuing financial compensation another unwanted side effect of mesothelioma, contact the attorneys at ClassAction.com.

FINANCIAL COMPENSATION
Unfortunately, there is nothing that can reverse the diagnosis a mesothelioma victim has received. Living with mesothelioma can quickly become costly, and it is unfair to bear the costs of a disease that was caused by another's negligence. Pursuing financial compensation can provide assistance with expensive medical bills, lost wages, funeral costs, among other mesothelioma-related expenses. Additionally, it could return financial stability to families of victims.
There are several sources of financial compensation, including:

**Trust Funds:** Despite knowing the harm to workers and their families, asbestos companies continued to mine and use the mineral for decades. When the true health risks associated with asbestos became known to the public, many of the asbestos companies were forced out of business. In order to make sure future victims had compensation available to them, the companies were forced to set up trust funds to compensate victims and their families before the companies were able to declare bankruptcy.

These trust funds had nearly $40 billion in them when they were started and are still well stocked today. If a patient qualifies, an attorney will file a claim with a company’s trust fund and present evidence that their client inhaled asbestos while working for that company.

**Lawsuits:** In some cases, a person may not be able to file a claim with one of the trust funds, and will need to file a lawsuit. While trust funds offer a more direct route to compensation, lawsuits can still yield compensation for medical bills, lost wages, and other mesothelioma-related expenses. An experienced mesothelioma attorney will know the best way to pursue compensation — whether through a trust or lawsuit.

**Veterans Affairs:** Just as it was popularly used in private industry, asbestos was also widely used by the U.S. military in all its branches. As a result, soldiers make up a disproportionate amount of mesothelioma patients. In an effort to remedy this wrong, the U.S. military has set up a program at the Department of Veterans Affairs so veterans with mesothelioma can file a claim to receive disability compensation, health services from the VA, special monthly compensation, and monthly payments for surviving spouses.

**Social Security Disability:** A person with mesothelioma can apply to receive disability from the Social Security Administration if they are diagnosed with mesothelioma. However, the SSA does not pay out disability to just anyone, and proof needs to be provided in order for the SSA to validate a claim. A knowledgeable mesothelioma attorney will know what needs to be done to pursue a mesothelioma disability claim with the SSA.

**CONCLUSION**

There is a deep sense of injustice in cases of mesothelioma. People, often near or just past the age of retirement, are diagnosed with a devastating form of cancer that they developed at no fault of their own. While there is little that can be done in the form of treating the disease, there are still ways to make sure justice is served.

To find out more about the legal options available to mesothelioma patients and their families, and how an attorney may be able to help, please visit ClassAction.com.