

Low-Dose CT Scans Are Used to Screen High-Risk Patients for Lung Cancer: *Are YOU a Candidate?*

Did you know that although lung cancer screening is extremely effective at identifying lung cancer in the early stages and improving survival rates, 95.5% of people who qualify for lung cancer screening have not been screened?

Here's what you need to know about lung cancer, lung cancer screening, and whether you qualify.

Lung cancer is the third most common cancer in the United States. According to the American Cancer Society, an estimated 234,580 new cases of lung cancer will be diagnosed in the U.S. in 2024.

Lung cancer is also the leading cause of cancer death in the U.S., accounting for about 20% of all cancer deaths. This is because cases are often diagnosed at later stages when the disease is less likely to be curable.

The good news is that the five-year survival rate for lung cancer has increased greatly over the last five years. One reason for this positive development is the availability of effective screening.

Lung cancer screening of high-risk populations is the best way to reduce mortality from lung cancer because it can catch lung cancer in its earlier stages. When lung cancer is diagnosed in an early stage, before it has spread, the five-year survival rate is greater than 63%. When diagnosed in a late stage, the five-year survival rate is just 8%.

Unfortunately, according to the American Lung Association's State of Lung Cancer 2023 Report, only 4.5% of individuals eligible for lung cancer screening were screened in 2022. Lung cancer screenings are conducted using low-dose CT (LDCT) scans for people at high risk for lung cancer, such as heavy smokers. In March 2021, the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) changed its lung cancer screening recommendations to include a larger age range and more current and former smokers.



Screening guidelines

Under the current USPSTF guidelines, you are eligible for annual lung cancer screening if you:

- Are aged 50–80
- Currently smoke or quit within the last 15 years
- Have a smoking history of 20 or more pack years. To obtain your “pack-year” number, use this equation: Pack years = (cigarettes per day ÷ 20) × number of years smoked. So, someone who smoked 1 pack per day for 20 years would have a 20 pack-year history, as would someone who smoked 2 packs a day for 10 years.

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The goal of these low-dose CT scans for lung cancer screening is to identify early-stage lung cancers that can still be treated with either surgery or radiation — and treated for cure, treated definitively.



Meriem Mokhtech, MD, Radiation Oncologist

If you meet the criteria, lung cancer screening is usually covered by your insurance. If you are not covered by insurance the cost is around \$200. Contact your primary care physician, who can determine whether you meet the criteria and refer you to a local organization for screening.

Most insurers require a counseling visit before screening. During this visit, you will discuss your medical history, receive a detailed assessment of your personal risk for lung cancer, and discuss the potential advantages and disadvantages of lung cancer screening. The screening itself is simple, painless, and noninvasive, and there are no needles or injections involved. It takes approximately 30 minutes. You will be asked to lie on your back on a table with your arms over your head. The table will slide to the center of the CT machine and the scanner will rotate around you, taking pictures of your lungs. The technologist will instruct you to remain very still and may ask that you hold your breath at times throughout the scan to obtain clear images. For screening to be most effective, people in this high-risk population should be screened annually.

“The goal of these low-dose CT scans for lung cancer screening is to identify early-stage lung cancers that can still



Where to go for lung cancer screening near Waterbury, CT

Naugatuck Valley Radiology Associates
1389 West Main Street
Waterbury, CT 06708
(203) 574-1311
nvrnet.com

Diagnostic Radiology Associates
134 Grandview Avenue, Suite 101
Waterbury, CT 06708
(203) 756-8911
draxray.com

Prospect Diagnostic Imaging
166 Waterbury Road, Suite 105
Prospect, CT 06712
(203) 758-7700

Scan to find all CT screening locations

Use the American College of Radiology's Lung Cancer Screening Locator Tool:



Or visit the Connecticut State Department of Health:



be treated with either surgery or radiation — and treated for cure, treated definitively,” said Dr. Meriem Mokhtech, an HLRCC radiation oncologist. “Once a lung cancer has spread to lymph nodes or outside of the thorax, a cure becomes a lot more difficult to achieve, and the treatments are much more involved. The goal is to catch things early so that they can be treated.”



David Hill, MD, FCCP

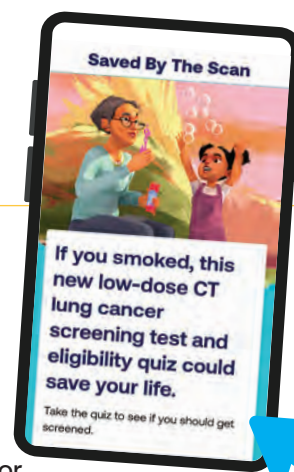
Director of Clinical Research at
Waterbury Pulmonary Associates

ASK THE DOC

What advice do you have for people who are at high risk for lung cancer?

Dr. Hill: While I think people should be concerned about lung cancer, they should also not be afraid to be evaluated for it, particularly those who fall into that high-risk group. The American Lung Association has a website called Saved By The Scan (pictured above right) where people can go and learn more about lung cancer screening. This can be found at [savedbythescan.org](https://www.savedbythescan.org). There's a quiz on that site that will go over whether you're truly eligible for screening.

If you don't meet all the eligibility criteria, but you're still concerned, you should talk to your physician. And, at the early stages, it's incredibly treatable. Nowadays, we really have made a lot of progress. It's not a diagnosis anyone wants to have. But we can help make people better.



SPOTLIGHT ON: THE OSTOMY SUPPORT GROUP



BOB REILING President and Executive Director of the Ostomy Foundation and President of the Waterbury Area Support Group at HLRCC.

“...a sense of community.”

Many people scheduled for ostomy surgery or who have had ostomy surgery don't know about the Waterbury Area Support Group at The Harold Leever Regional Cancer Center.

The Ostomy Support Group offers an opportunity for participants of all ages to share their experiences, learn from one another, and build meaningful connections. Meetings are held at 6:30 p.m. on the first Monday of each month, except on holiday Mondays.

The group encourages open discussions about challenges and successes related to living with an ostomy, with attendees sharing tips on managing ostomy care, ensuring that everyone feels supported on their journey.

“We've built a sense of community,” said Bob Reiling, president of the Waterbury Area Ostomy Support Group. “We're all invested in each other's health. It becomes a support family.”

When Reiling had his ostomy surgery in 1992 at age 19, he tried a couple of support groups, looking for information

and tips on techniques. “Back then, it seemed as though all the support groups I found were very negative,” said Reiling, who is also the president and executive director of the Ostomy Foundation in New Milford, Connecticut, a nonprofit organization he founded in 2020.

“What we try to provide is a much more positive energy in the room.”

The center's support group also collaborates with the medical community to provide access to expert knowledge. Guest speakers, including specialty nurses and representatives from medical supply companies, regularly join meetings to present valuable information about products and resources.

In addition to educational resources, the group offers practical support, including access to essential supplies.

Anyone is welcome to attend the meetings. For more information and to confirm dates, contact Bob Reiling (bob@ostomyfoundation.org) or Deborah Rose (drose@ostomyfoundation.org), or call (475) 209-2404.



DEBORAH ROSE Assistant Director and Vice President of Public Relations for the Ostomy Foundation and Treasurer of the Waterbury Area Support Group at HLRCC.

In This Season of Giving

Help us continue to be a place of hope and healing

We invite you to be part of our Hope Lives Here annual appeal. As we strive to continue delivering high-quality services, we are asking you to make a donation to support our mission. Every contribution, no matter the size, helps us provide essential treatments and resources to those in need.

If you believe in the work we do and want to make a difference in the lives of our patients and their families, please consider making a donation. Your generosity allows us to enhance our services and support the local community.

Thank you for being an integral part of our Leever family. Together, we can continue to provide hope and healing to those who need it most.



Thank you for supporting our mission! Please scan the QR code to donate. ▶





Celebrating Cancer Survivors

Greater Waterbury Relay for Life 2024

HLRCC celebrated National Cancer Survivors Day at the 2024 Greater Waterbury Relay for Life on Saturday, June 15, at Holy Cross High School. National Cancer Survivors Day is the day each year when we pause to honor those with a history of cancer for their strength and courage. Survivors Day at Relay gave survivors the opportunity to connect with each other, celebrate milestones, share inspiration and support, and recognize those who have supported them along the way. We thank everyone who joined us to honor this special day and salute cancer survivors everywhere!

Team Leever member Karen Senich is seen here having fun with Chompers, one of the mascots for the Hartford Yard Goats.

Hope Rides with Us 14th Annual Closer to Free Ride

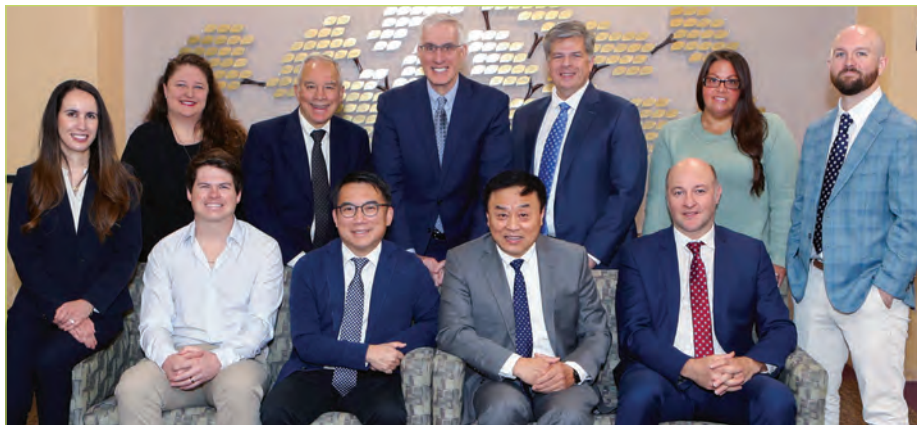
On September 7, more than 2,000 riders and 600 volunteers participated in the 14th Annual Closer to Free Ride. The event is held every year to support research and care at Smilow Cancer Hospital and Yale Cancer Center while giving riders of all levels the chance to experience five professionally designed and fully supported routes ranging from 10 to 100 miles long. Those not able to join the New Haven event had the option of participating virtually from anywhere. The event has raised \$29 million since 2011.

Karen Hammond, DNP, and Dr. Michael Grant from Smilow Cancer Hospital at Yale-New Haven rode as part of the Rays of Hope team.



Waterbury Hospital Attains National Accreditation

Excellence in Rectal Cancer Treatment



Dr. John Zhang of Waterbury Hospital (front row, second from right) led the team that attained national accreditation from the American College of Surgeons. "This accreditation ensures that patients in Greater Waterbury will continue to receive the highest quality of care," said Waterbury Health President and CEO Deborah K. Weymouth.

From Dr. Joseph Ravalese, III, Radiation Oncologist and Medical Director, HLRCC:

"On behalf of the radiation and medical oncologists from The Harold Leever Regional Cancer Center, I would like to congratulate Waterbury Hospital, Dr. John Zhang, and associates for leading the HLRCC Multidisciplinary GI Program team in achieving Excellence in Rectal Cancer Treatment as evidenced by attaining NAPRC accreditation, which recognizes compliance with comprehensive standards in providing high-quality rectal cancer care."

Raising Awareness and Funds for Breast Cancer *All Year Long*

The Leever Center was a pink diamond sponsor of Pink Out Day 2024, which was held Wednesday, October 30, to raise awareness during Breast Cancer Awareness Month. The event was held by the Saint Mary's Hospital Foundation in partnership with the City of Waterbury, Waterbury Fire Department, Waterbury Police Department, local schools, and businesses, and included a press conference at Waterbury City Hall. The goal was to raise funds, promote awareness, and inform the community of all the breast health services available to women in need. All proceeds support the Saint Mary's Hospital Foundation's Breast Screening Fund. This year, more than \$60,000 was raised to provide free screening, diagnostic, and essential breast health services to more than 150 local women.



Above: Maloney Interdistrict Magnet School in Waterbury held a Pink Out Day and generously donated the proceeds to HLRCC.

Below, left: Breast surgeon Dr. Nicole Sookhan spoke at a breast cancer awareness town gathering in Wolcott with a message of early detection and treatment. She also highlighted the availability of genetic testing, advancements in immunotherapy, and a special test to check for cancer DNA in the blood of survivors.

Below, right: Are You Dense? Inc. held their ninth annual "For the Girls & Guys" brunch on Sunday, October 20, at the Grand Oak Villa in Watertown. Guests enjoyed an inspiring afternoon with guest speaker Kateri Kenney. The Leever Center was proud to be a sponsor.



A Well-Deserved Honor *for One of Our Own*

Leever Operations Director Deborah Parkinson (front row, third from right, holding award) was recently honored for her invaluable support of Quilts That Care. This nonprofit organization hand crafts and donates one-of-a-kind quilts to cancer patients. QTC's mission is to "wrap cancer patients and their families in comfort and hope, one quilt at a time."

Well deserved, Deb! You inspire us all!



Microplastics:

Scratching the Surface to Look Deeper

Can you guess what man-made product can be found in most foods, our water supply, and household items, including the furniture we sit on, the plates we eat from, the straws we drink through, and the toys our kids play with, as well as the clothes we wear, the cars we drive, hair and make-up products, and the animals we consume, especially marine life? If you guessed “plastic,” you were correct.

Plastic was first invented in 1922. Yearly production has exploded from 1.7 million tons in the 1950s to 400 million tons in 2021, generating \$600 billion a year. Shoppers around the world buy 1 million plastic bottles every minute and use 5 trillion plastic grocery bags every year. Some have estimated that each of us likely consumes as much as 5 grams, or a credit card’s worth, of plastic, every week.

Why is this a concern? Any plastic item eventually breaks down with time and usage into tiny fragments called microplastics (or an even smaller version called nanoplastics). In addition to being environmental pollutants, microplastics can be inhaled or consumed through our foods. Once in our bodies, they can get into our tissues and/or bloodstream, creating inflammation and possibly chronic disease. Microplastics can also absorb and accumulate toxic chemicals, which can then be released into the body, leading to further inflammation, oxidative stress and hormone disturbances.

If you are throwing your hands up right now, saying some version of “Is there ANYTHING that is safe to eat or drink anymore?” you are not alone. We are all overwhelmed by the onslaught of information we get every day. To get some perspective, look around to see and assess just how prevalent the presence of plastic is in our lives. It is virtually everywhere but, there are proactive steps you can take to significantly minimize your exposure (see below).



In conclusion, don’t forget about the importance of healthy eating, by adhering to a Mediterranean or plant-based diet, which includes an abundance of fresh produce, whole grains, fiber, lean proteins, healthy fats like olive oil, and minimally processed foods. Consume red meats, sodium, and alcohol in moderation, exercise regularly, and keep your weight in a healthy range.

Every New Year, many people make resolutions, but few can sustain them. Assess what is reasonable for you and your family, then set small achievable goals. Let 2025 be the year where you take an inventory of your health to make and keep meaningful changes.

10 Ways to Reduce Microplastics in Your Food

Although you can’t completely eliminate your exposure, here are some helpful things you can do.



- 1** Cut back on or cut out bottled water. Instead, drink from glass or stainless-steel containers.
- 2** Whenever possible, avoid single-use plastics, like ziplock bags, plastic wrap, plastic cups, and cutlery. Instead, use glass containers with silicone lids to store your leftovers.
- 3** Do not heat plastic in the microwave since heat releases the microplastics which then leach into your food.
- 4** Wash plastic by hand and let it air-dry or dry by hand.
- 5** Try avoiding plastic-wrapped fruits and vegetables when possible.
- 6** The best cookware is cast iron, stainless steel, or enameled cast iron. If you have nonstick pans, make sure they are not scratched or chipped, or use ceramic-coated cookware.
- 7** Use wood or bamboo cutting boards.
- 8** Avoid ultra-processed foods.
- 9** Use glass or silicone baby bottles.
- 10** Whenever possible, cook at home with fresh ingredients.

By Leever Nutritionist Karen Sabbath, MS, RD, CSO (ksabbath@leevercancercenter.org or 203-575-5510)

A Community of Caring

MAKING A DIFFERENCE Heartfelt appreciation to our generous friends at **The Siemon Company**, whose employees chose HLRCC as this year's charity. A total of 75 patient care bags were donated! Below, left to right: Deborah Parkinson, Operations Director of HLRCC, Jenn Overbaugh, and Jay Nanfeto from Siemon.



THANK YOU FOR BEING A FRIEND

To show support for a friend with cancer, an assortment of delicious snacks were donated. Accepting was Leever Social Worker Melissa Seres, MSW, LCSW, OSW-C (left).



PROTECTING & SERVING We sincerely thank the **Watertown Police Department** for organizing and hosting the ninth Annual Charity Golf Tournament. "Not only do the Watertown Police put their lives on the line every day protecting our community; they also have been working to support the programs of HLRCC" said Kevin Kniery, Executive Director of HLRCC. "Over the last nine years, they have raised more than \$140,000 to support us in funding various programs for the cancer patients in our community."

Above, left to right: Chief of Police Joshua Bernegger; Officer Austin Keeney, Tournament Coordinator; Kevin Kniery, HLRCC Executive Director; Tom Belzek, HLRCC Finance Director; Deputy Chief of Police Renee Dominguez.

Our immense gratitude for the contributions from our community including:

- **Deborah Zindell and Ethel Grant** for beautiful handmade blankets.
- **Alissa Henderson and Grace Lutheran Church, Naugatuck**, for warm knit hats.
- **Carol Wright** for the thoughtful wig donation.
- **Melissa Navarra** for the generous donation of 41 hats.
- **Joyce Balanda** for knit hats and cozy lap blankets.
- **Maryann Jackson** for her continued donations including the lap blankets and crocheted chemo caps.
- **Mary Ann Barone, Mary Ann Mizeski, and the Waterbury Senior Center** for the wonderful crocheted items, scarves, blankets, and shawls.
- **Busy Bees Farmingbury Women's Club, Wolcott**, for the comfort pillows, port protectors, and fleece throws.
- Once again, we are so grateful to **Dominic Rinaldi** in partnership with **O'Rourke & Birch Florists, Waterbury**, for another donation of beautiful vases of flowers for Leever patients in loving memory of his wife, **Antoinette Rinaldi**.

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We encourage your feedback.
If there is a cancer topic you would like covered, to respond to an article you've read, or to be put on our mailing list, please call 203-575-5555 or email: dparkinson@leevercancercenter.org



**THE HAROLD LEEVER
REGIONAL CANCER CENTER**

1075 Chase Parkway, Waterbury, CT 06708
203-575-5555
leevercancercenter.org

Monthly Support Groups



ART THERAPY CANCER SUPPORT GROUP

Second and fourth Tuesday of every month
3:30 - 5:00 PM

Location: HLRCC

To register, call 203-790-6568 x109 or email
clientservices@annsplace.org.

BRAVE AT HEART: WOMEN'S BREAST CANCER SUPPORT GROUP

First Wednesday of every month
7:00 - 8:00 PM

Location: Jesse Camille's, Naugatuck, CT

For more information, please email
BraveatHeart3@gmail.com or call
Sue Ascencao at 203-232-3026.

COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

Second Thursday of every month
6:30 - 9:00 PM

Location: HLRCC Meditation Room, 1st Floor

For more information, please contact
Kathy Daisey: 203-723-5067 or
Sharon Burns: 860-384-1398.

CT MULTIPLE MYELOMA FIGHTERS SUPPORT GROUP

Second Wednesday of every month
6:00 - 8:00 PM

Location: Prospect Library

For more information, please contact
Robin Tuohy: 203-206-3536.

GREATER WATERBURY AREA OSTOMY SUPPORT GROUP

First Monday of every month

6:30 - 8:30 PM

Location: HLRCC Conference Center,
Ground Floor

See page 3 to learn more.

Contact Bob or Deborah at the Ostomy
Foundation: 475-209-2404.

HOPE MUTUAL AID GROUP FOR PATIENTS AND THEIR LOVED ONES

First and third Tuesday of every month
4:00 - 5:00 PM

Location: HLRCC Patient Resource Library

This group provides a comfortable and
confidential environment in which to share
your experiences and gain strength and
encouragement. For additional information,
contact Melissa Seres, MSW, LCSW, OSW-C:
mseres@leeverscancercenter.org or
203-575-5511.

LIVING WITH STAGE 4/INCURABLE CANCER SUPPORT GROUP

Second and fourth Tuesday of every month
1:30 - 3:00 PM

Location: HLRCC

To register, call 203-790-6568 x109 or email
clientservices@annsplace.org.

NEW!

HELPFUL RESOURCES

For programs providing
support and information:
211 or 211.org

Direct numbers for specific resources:

Domestic violence

888-774-2900 English
844-831-9200 Spanish

Suicide

866-794-0021 Greater Waterbury

Child abuse

800-842-2288

Crisis hotline for young adults

Text "listen" to 741741

Elder abuse

888-385-4225

Sexual assault

888-999-5545 English
888-568-8332 Spanish

Veterans crisis hotline

800-273-8255 and press 1
Text: 838255
or veteranscrisisline.net

Alcoholics Anonymous

866-783-7712 English
or ct-aa.org

Narcotics Anonymous

800-662-4357/800-420-9064
ctna.org

National Alliance of Mental Health (NAMI)

800-215-3021

Food resources

ctfoodbank.org
(Local food pantries can be
looked up by zip code)

"Sometimes we need someone to simply be there.

**Not to fix anything or do anything in particular, but
just to let us feel we are supported and cared about."**

— Unknown

