

What is Mesothelioma and How Did I Get it?

If your doctor has told you that you have mesothelioma, you may still have a lot of basic questions about the disease.

If you or a loved one has recently been diagnosed with mesothelioma, you probably have many questions. One of the most basic questions asked by patients and their families is "What is Mesothelioma and how did I get it?"

There has been a lot of coverage in the press about this disease and you may already have a lot of information about Mesothelioma from your doctor.

Our purpose is to offer what we hope is a simple explanation and define some terms you will hear when you are talking to your doctor, so that you and your family can have a solid understanding of the disease.

Before you can understand Mesothelioma, you have to understand asbestos (the substance that causes Mesothelioma). Asbestos is actually just a commercial name for a naturally occurring mineral.

Asbestos is a fibrous silicate that was commonly used in insulation and construction materials, as well as electrical insulation, fireproofing materials, roofing, and filters, because it offered high heat resistance. This mineral was also used to make automobile brakes at one time.

If you or a loved one worked for a company that made asbestos-containing products, or if you lived or live in a house that still has asbestos insulation, that is probably the source of your illness. The U.S. government has since regulated the amount of asbestos that can be used in any product and how and where these products can be used or installed.

Because asbestos is so fibrous, tiny threadlike fibers can circulate in the air and water within or around a house or business containing asbestos materials.

Therein lies the problem!

With prolonged exposure to asbestos you can sustain gradual but serious damage to your lungs.

The medical term 'mesothelioma' relates to the area of your body that is affected by the asbestos fibers when you inhale them. The 'mesothelium' is a two-layered membrane that protects most of your internal organs. One of these layers envelopes the organ, and the other layer forms a sac around the organ and the first layer to protect it even further. In between these two layers is a volume of fluid that lubricates everything, and allows flexible movement so that the heart can beat and the lungs can expand and contract without rubbing against other structures in your body.

The 'peritoneal' mesothelium covers the abdominal cavity, and the 'pleural' mesothelium covers and protects the lungs and the chest cavity, whereas the 'pericardial' mesothelium protects the heart. When you inhale asbestos into your lungs, the cells around these inhaled fibers become abnormal or cancerous. And these rogue cells damage the tissue and the organs near the site of invasion. Because asbestos is inhaled, most cases of mesothelioma start in the pleural or the peritoneal mesothelium (because they are the closest to the lungs).

The three most common diseases caused by asbestos are 'asbestosis' (a non-cancerous form of lung disease), lung cancer and mesothelioma (a cancer that starts within the layers of the mesothelium).

The symptoms of mesothelioma do not appear for years after exposure (sometimes as long as 50 years later), and may begin as shortness of breath or pain in the chest. These symptoms come from a build-up of fluid in the pleural cavity. If the disease is in the peritoneal mesothelium, your symptoms may start as weight loss and abdominal pain as your abdomen fills with fluid.

To diagnose mesothelioma, your doctor will look for a history of exposure to asbestos at work or at home and he will perform a physical, including x-rays and possibly a lung function test. He may order a CT (CAT) scan or MRI to get more information.

Ultimately, your doctor will need to take a biopsy to positively confirm that mesothelioma is present. A surgeon will remove a small sample of tissue from your body so that it can be tested and examined for disease.

If you have mesothelioma, your doctor will try to figure out what 'stage' the disease is in - in other words, how long have you had the disease - so he can determine how best to treat the disease.

Treatments include surgery, radiation therapy or chemotherapy or a combination of these treatments.

Your doctor will talk to you about the possible tests for mesothelioma, your specific test results and his treatment recommendations.

Source: <http://www.articlecircle.com>

About the Author

Learn everything you need to know about mesothelioma in simple terms you can understand. Visit our web site at: <http://www.mesotheliomadnld.com>