

Double Lung Transplants May Be Rare, but They Just Saved Two Lives

Both recipients had Stage IV lung cancer and were given only weeks to live. Here's why double lung transplants are so uncommon.

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The stars aligned for two people with Stage IV [lung cancer](#) who received lifesaving double lung transplants after being told they had just weeks to live, [CNN reports](#).

Albert Khoury, 54, of Chicago, was diagnosed with Stage I lung cancer in 2020 near the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. By July 2020, the cancer had reached Stage IV. He was told to consider all his options, including hospice care.

His sister suggested that he connect with Northwestern Medicine in Chicago to discuss a potential double lung [transplant](#).

In the United States, lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer-related deaths. Double lung transplants are typically reserved for people whose cancer has spread to other parts of the [lungs](#) but not to other parts of the body. These transplants are also considered only when patients have tried all other treatment options and have limited time to live, Ankit Bharat, MD, chief of thoracic surgery at the Northwestern Medicine Canning Thoracic Institute, who treated Khoury, [told CNN](#).

After Khoury developed pneumonia and sepsis and was placed in intensive care, his oncologists considered the seldom-used procedure.

Ensuring that cancer has not metastasized, or spread to other parts of the body, is of utmost importance before carrying out a transplant, explained William Dahut, chief scientific officer at the American Cancer Society.

Experts warn that in people with late-stage cancers, removing just one lung leaves a chance that cancer cells from the attached lung will invade the new transplanted lung and the cancer will return.

To diminish the risk for recurrence, Bharat and his team decided they would open the chest cavity and perform a full heart and lung bypass.

“Essentially, what that means is, we don’t let any blood go through the heart and the lungs and bypass all of that,” Bharat said. “That allows us to then stop the blood flow to the lungs, which will prevent any cancer cells from going from the lung into the bloodstream.”

In September 2021, Khoury became eligible for the procedure. Eighteen months later, Khoury has not experienced any complications, and X-rays show no signs of cancer in his chest.

The second transplant reported by CNN involved Tannaz Ameli, 64, a retired nurse from Minneapolis who was diagnosed with Stage IV lung cancer in January 2022 and told she had three months to live. Her husband reached out to Northwestern Medicine; oncologists there determined Ameli was eligible for a double lung transplant.

Doctors performed a full heart and lung bypass on Ameli as well. She underwent the procedure in July 2022 and has been declared cancer-free; what’s more, she hasn’t had any complications since. “Every morning when I open my eyes, I just can’t believe it,” she said. “Life has a different meaning now.”

Lung cancer accounts for about a quarter of all cancer deaths, according to the National Cancer Institute. An estimated 222,500 people were diagnosed with lung cancer in 2017, and 155,800 died of the disease. To learn more about lung cancer, including risk factors, symptoms and treatments, read the [Cancer Health Basics on Lung Cancer](#).

And for a collection of articles on the topic, click [#Lung Cancer](#). You’ll find headlines including:

- [“How to Save 60,000 Lives From Lung Cancer Each Year,”](#)
- [“Lung-Sparing Surgery Is Effective for Some People With Early-Stage Lung Cancer,”](#)
- [“My Wife and Cancer Care Supporter Speaks with LUNgevity About Mental Wellness,”](#)
- [“What Are Pack-Years?”](#)
- [“Conquering Fear and Metastatic Lung Cancer,” the winter 2023 Cancer Health cover story.](#)