

Lung Cancer and the AKT1 E17K Mutation

This material will help you understand:

- the basics of lung cancer
- the role of the AKT1 gene in lung cancer
- if there are any drugs that might work better if you have certain changes in the AKT1 gene

What is lung cancer?

Lung cancer is a type of cancer that starts in the lungs. It is the number one cause of cancer deaths in the world. Doctors name lung cancers based on how lung cells look under a microscope. There are two main groups of lung cancer: small cell lung cancer (SCLC) and non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC). Most people with lung cancer have NSCLC. Adenocarcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma, and large cell carcinoma are types of NSCLC.

What causes lung cancer?

Cancer is a result of changes in our genes. Genes contain the instructions for making proteins. Changes in genes, called mutations, may result in changes in proteins. These changes may cause cells to grow out of control which could lead to cancer.

The biggest risk factor for lung cancer is exposure to cigarette smoke. But, not all lung cancers are due to smoking. Other risk factors include exposure to radon gas, asbestos and pollution.

What are the most common current treatments for lung cancer?

Doctors may treat lung cancer using one or more of these options:

- **Surgery** – operation that removes as much of a cancer tumor as possible.
- **Radiation** – treatment that uses high-energy beams to kill cells in the area where the cancer is growing.
- **Traditional chemotherapy** – drugs that kill growing cells. All cells grow. Cancer cells usually grow faster than most healthy cells. So, these drugs kill more cancer cells. But because these drugs kill healthy cells too, this can cause unwanted side effects.
- **Precision medicine therapy** – treatments that target proteins involved in cancer. These therapies mainly kill cancer cells and not healthy cells. This also means you may have fewer side effects. Two types of precision medicine therapies are:
 - **Small molecule therapy** – mainly acts on cells with specific protein changes. Small molecule therapy uses drugs to target those proteins. Genetic testing can tell if your cancer cells have protein changes that can be targeted. Small molecule therapy is a type of targeted therapy.
 - **Immune-based therapy** – works with your body's defense system to fight cancer. These can mark cancer cells so they are easier for your immune system to find.

Can I pass on mutations found in my cancer cells to my children?

You cannot pass on mutations found only in your cancer cells to your children.

How well does cancer drug treatment work?

After a while, your cancer cells may stop responding to the drug(s). This means your cancer may start to grow again. Your doctor will do regular checkups to watch for this. If the cancer starts to come back, your doctor can try another drug or treatment.

What is AKT1?

AKT1 is the name of both a gene[📄] and a protein[📄]. The AKT1 gene contains the instructions for making the AKT1 protein. AKT1 is part of many different pathways. Proteins in pathways work together to do specific jobs within the cell. The healthy cell image (Figure 1) shows examples of proteins and pathways activated by AKT1. AKT1 helps control metabolism, new blood vessels formation, and cell growth and survival.

In healthy cells, signals from outside the cell turn proteins “on” or “off” as needed. As the signal reaches proteins in the pathway, the proteins are turned on. When the PI3K protein receives the signal, it can activate AKT1. AKT1 can then turn on other proteins, such as IKK, mTOR, and NOS3. Each of these proteins in turn activates a different pathway.

How do mutations in proteins affect pathways?

If a mutation[📄] affects one or more proteins[📄] in a pathway, the proteins may not be able to be turned on or off as expected. This can cause cells to grow out of control and lead to cancer.

How common are AKT1 mutations in lung cancer?

About 1 in 100 non-small cell lung cancers (NSCLCs) have a mutation[📄] in the AKT1 gene[📄] that changes the AKT1 protein[📄]. AKT1 mutations can be found in both adenocarcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma lung cancers.

What is the AKT1 E17K mutation?

AKT1 E17K is a specific variation in the AKT1 protein[📄]. Proteins are long chains of amino acids[📄]. The AKT1 protein has 480 amino acids. AKT1 with no mutation[📄] at amino acid position 17 has a glutamic acid, or E for short. The amino acid at position 17 in AKT1 with the E17K mutation is a lysine, or K for short.

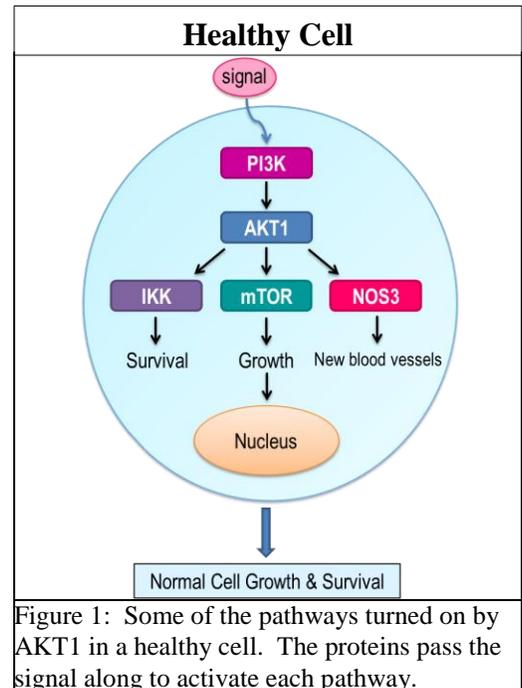
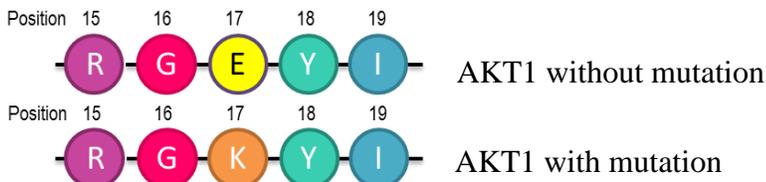


Figure 1: Some of the pathways turned on by AKT1 in a healthy cell. The proteins pass the signal along to activate each pathway.



What is the effect of this mutation?

In cells with the E17K mutation, AKT1 is always turned on. This can cause cells to grow out of control and lead to cancer (Figure 2).

Are there targeted therapies for AKT1 E17K?

At this time, it is unclear if any drugs target AKT1 with this specific mutation. But, you should talk to your doctor about your treatment options.

What if I have a different mutation in AKT1 or “no mutation”?

Your cancer cells might have mutations in this gene or in other genes that were not tested. Your genetic test results will still help your doctor determine the best treatment for you.

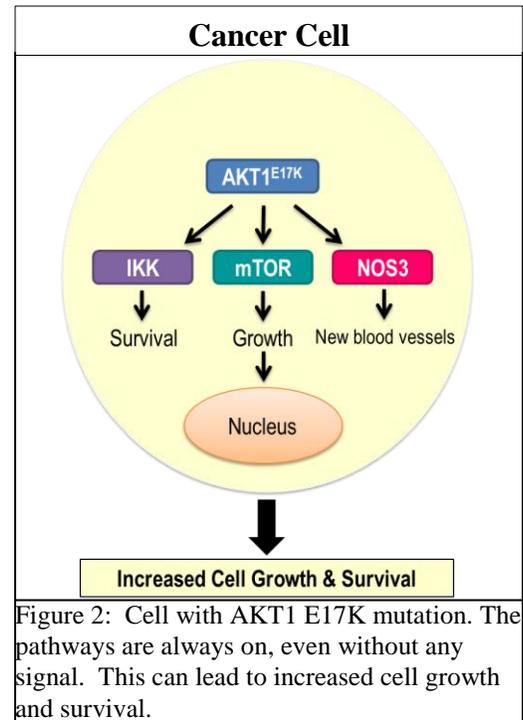


Figure 2: Cell with AKT1 E17K mutation. The pathways are always on, even without any signal. This can lead to increased cell growth and survival.