



FIGURE 289-1 Asbestosis. A. Frontal chest radiograph shows bilateral calcified pleural plaques consistent with asbestos-related pleural disease. Poorly defined linear and reticular abnormalities are seen in the lower lobes bilaterally. **B.** Axial high-resolution computed tomography of the thorax obtained through the lung bases shows bilateral, subpleural reticulation (*black arrows*), representing fibrotic lung disease due to asbestosis. Subpleural lines are also present (*arrowheads*), characteristic of, though not specific for, asbestosis. Calcified pleural plaques representing asbestos-related pleural disease (*white arrows*) are also evident.

Pulmonary function testing in asbestosis reveals a restrictive pattern with a decrease in both lung volumes and diffusing capacity. There may also be evidence of mild airflow obstruction (due to peribronchiolar fibrosis).

Because no specific therapy is available for asbestosis, supportive care is the same as that given to any patient with diffuse interstitial fibrosis of any cause. In general, newly diagnosed cases will have resulted from exposures that occurred many years before.

Lung cancer ([Chap. 78](#)) is the most common cancer associated with asbestos exposure. The excess frequency of lung cancer (all histologic types) in asbestos workers is associated with a minimum latency of 15–19 years between first exposure and development of the disease. Persons with more exposure are at greater risk of disease. In addition, there is a significant interactive effect of smoking and asbestos exposure that results in greater risk than what would be expected from the additive effect of each factor.

Mesotheliomas ([Chap. 294](#)), both pleural and peritoneal, are also associated with asbestos exposure. In contrast to lung cancers, these tumors do not appear to be associated with smoking. Relatively short-term asbestos exposures of ≤ 1 –2 years, occurring up to 40 years in the past, have been associated with the development of mesotheliomas (an observation that emphasizes the importance of obtaining a complete environmental exposure history).