



CANCERcare®

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# Caring for Your Loved One with Lung Cancer

A lung cancer diagnosis may bring up a variety of difficult emotions for you and your loved ones. Its impact can be felt in relationships with friends and family as the responsibility of providing care falls on your shoulders. As you navigate the peaks and valleys of watching a loved one cope with lung cancer, here are some tips to help you care for your loved one and for yourself.

## Avoid “information overload”

Upon hearing that your loved one has been diagnosed with lung cancer, you may find yourself searching websites to learn more about the disease and treatment options. Looking at lung cancer statistics can leave you or your loved one feeling anxious or even depressed.

Remember that statistics are numbers that catalog thousands of individuals. They do not represent the specific outcome that your loved one will face. It is also important to remember that a patient’s prognosis can change over the course of treatment, especially with the approval of new treatments or by enrolling in clinical trials. Talk with your health care team about the specific prognosis for your loved one and about any questions you may have about lung cancer.



## Be aware of stigma

A lung cancer diagnosis can be challenging to face because of the stigma associated with the disease. As a caregiver and advocate, you may have to overcome prejudice or bias on three different levels:

- **Society level:** Although 85 percent of lung cancers are caused by smoking, lung cancer also affects people who have never been exposed to cigarette smoke or tobacco products. The public may automatically assume that a lung cancer diagnosis means the patient has a history of smoking.
- **Family level:** The pressures of caring for a loved one with lung cancer may cause some family members to inadvertently make a loved one feel guilty about a cancer diagnosis, especially if it is a result of smoking. Since cancer impacts the entire family, consider talking with an oncology social worker to work through the mix of emotions that come with being a caregiver.
- **Patient level:** A cancer diagnosis can cause a person to reflect upon past choices to identify what could have led to the diagnosis. Your loved one may already feel guilty and think the cancer is deserved. As a result, he or she might not follow the doctor’s instructions or not seek the best medical care. If you notice your loved one taking the blame for his or her lung cancer diagnosis, work with your health care team to provide appropriate support.

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## Pace yourself

As a caregiver, you should prepare yourself to experience highs and lows as part of the cancer journey.

Lung cancer is often referred to as the “invisible cancer” because the cancer is often diagnosed at an advanced stage. Available treatment options may act as palliative measures, and focus on maintaining quality of life.

Therapies can also be aggressive, leaving some patients to experience severe side effects. It is also possible that the cancer may not respond to standard chemotherapy or even become resistant to drugs.

If lung cancer is caught at an early stage, surgery may be an option, but the recovery can be difficult. As a caregiver, it can be overwhelming to care for your loved one who is in pain. You may even wonder if the treatment is really working. Talk to your health care team about managing side effects and about any questions you have regarding your loved one’s treatment.

## Take care of yourself

Caring for a loved one with lung cancer can be a long road, and so it is important not to burn out early. Remember to take care of yourself as you strive to stay on top of tracking doctor’s appointments, treatment schedules, updating family and friends, as well as juggling your own life. Seek counseling from a professional oncology social worker, delegate caregiving responsibilities to friends and loved ones, and spend some alone time to relax and recharge.

Consider joining a support group. You may find it helpful talking to other caregivers who are going through a similar situation.

## CancerCare Can Help

If you or a loved one has been diagnosed with lung cancer, contact CancerCare. We are a national nonprofit organization that provides free, professional support services for anyone affected by cancer. Our services include individual counseling, support groups, education, financial help, and referrals to other resources. To learn more, call us at **800-813-HOPE (4673)** or visit [www.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org).



## Smoking and Lung Cancer

If your loved one is a smoker and continues to use tobacco products during and after treatment, you may feel frustrated and anxious about how it will affect the treatment results. Addiction to nicotine can be powerful and may keep your loved one from being able to quit.

In addition, smoking may also provide relief and comfort during stressful situations. If your loved one’s decision to smoke is affecting your relationship, talking to an oncology social worker may help in developing communications skills that improve your relationship. Talk to your health care team to discuss the effects of smoking during and after treatment and to learn about cessation programs.

## Tips for Caregivers:

- Take a break and do something that you enjoy
- Know your limits; don’t be afraid to say “no” to family and friends
- Write down your thoughts and feelings
- Seek the support of a professional counselor
- Join a support group

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