



LUNG CANCER CANADA

Awareness. Support. Education.

For Patients and Caregivers: Coping and Emotional Support

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If you are a lung cancer patient or caregiver, you may find that often times it will be left to you to initiate conversation about the illness with other family and friends. This may be because those around you may fear invading your personal space and are hesitant about what to ask or say. Whether you choose to tell only close family or everyone with whom you socialize or work, there is one common principle that aids communication – to be as open and honest as possible.

Table 1 - Common Reactions and Questions

Reaction	Feeling	What It Does
<i>"I can't believe it. This can't be true."</i>	Shock	Can often leave you feeling numb and in disbelief. ¹
<i>"I don't have lung cancer. The doctors misdiagnosed it."</i>	Denial	While it allows you time to adjust to a new diagnosis, it can be problematic if it prevents you from getting appropriate treatment and support. ²
<i>"I can't have lung cancer. I never smoked."</i>	Shock, Denial	Lung cancer being seen solely as a smoker's disease is a common misperception. As noted above, this reaction will give you time to adjust but can be problematic if it remains.
<i>"If I hadn't smoked, I would have never gotten lung cancer."</i>	Blame, Guilt	You may experience guilt if you blame yourself. This is a common reaction for patients who smoked. Although it is important to recognize this reaction, it is also important to understand that getting "stuck" in blame is not productive.
<i>"I just don't feeling like doing anything."</i>	Sadness, Depression	Being sad is normal following a diagnosis. Depression is different from sadness and can be a serious problem. You should speak to your physician if your feelings persist and prevent you from dealing effectively with your situation. Other symptoms of depression may include loss of interest in life, suicidal ideation, loss of appetite, and/or changes in sleeping patterns.
<i>"Bad things are always happening to me. I can't catch a break."</i>	Anger	Anger can be a cloak for expressing one's fear, confusion or sadness. ¹ Having an opportunity to discuss all of one's feelings may be the best means for diminishing anger.
<i>"No one knows how I feel. I am all alone."</i>	Loneliness	People with lung cancer may often feel that no one else can truly appreciate how they are feeling. Support groups can be helpful for patients as a means of identifying with other patients, hopefully alleviating feelings of isolation.
<i>"What is going to happen to me? Am I going to die?"</i>	Fear	Fear is a typical response to a new diagnosis. A new patient may wonder "What's happening to me? Am I going to die?" the best thing to do is gather as much information as you can regarding your diagnosis and don't be afraid to ask your doctor specific question. It might also be helpful to discuss these difficult feelings with someone you trust.

¹ Cancer Research UK (2002). www.cancerhelp.org.uk "Living with Cancer: Your feelings."

² U.S. National Cancer Institute (2005). www.cancer.gov "Taking time: Support for people with cancer and the people who care about them."



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Communicating about cancer:

"In terms of your emotional and social well-being, communication is an important factor in how you cope with your illness, treatment and recovery."

- Canadian Association of Nurses in Oncology

Taking care of our caregivers:

"I have the right to take care of myself. This is not an act of selfishness. It will give me the capability of taking better care of my loved one."

-Saskatoon Caregiver Information Centre

Points to Consider:

- Communication with family and friends at the best of times can be taxing. For others, it comes easily. Historic patterns of communication will likely influence how and with whom you speak to about lung cancer.
- Some people choose to tell only close family about their lung cancer diagnosis while others tell everyone with whom they socialize or work. Despite these different choices, there is one common principle that aids communication – to be as open and honest as possible. Without it, people may be left to fill in the gaps themselves, often erroneously, and may be left to imagine the worst. This is especially true for young children who have little experience in understanding and dealing with illness.
- Don't be surprised if you, as the patient or caregiver, are often the one to initiate conversation about the illness with other family and friends. Those around you often fear invading your personal space and are hesitant about what to ask or say.
- Open and honest communication with family and friends can garner many things including compassion, emotional support and practical assistance.

Symptoms of Caregiver Stress may include:

- Feelings of depression and helplessness
- Severe and constant fatigue
- Decrease in work production
- Withdrawal from social contacts
- Increase in use of stimulants and alcohol
- Increasing fear of death
- Change in eating and sleeping patterns

Strategies to Lessen Caregiver Stress and Prevent Burnout

- Consult with professionals, such as a Social Worker, to explore issues around caring for the patient and symptoms of caregiver fatigue.
- Seek out others who are caring for a loved one for mutual support, understanding and the exchange of coping strategies.
- Exercise daily and maintain a healthy diet.
- Set aside time, each day if possible, for yourself to do whatever you find enjoyable and refreshing – have something to look forward to as often as possible
- Stay involved in usual activities to the greatest extent possible.
- Share the caregiving responsibilities with other caregivers and regularly vary the focus of caregiving responsibilities.

For more information on coping and for emotional support, speak with your Oncology treatment team which includes a Social Worker, Physician, Nurse, Psychologist and/or Psychiatrist.

Lung Cancer Support Information, Programs and Services:

- Lung Cancer Canada – www.lungcancer canada.ca
- Wellspring Cancer Support Network - www.wellspring.ca
- Local Cancer Support Community/Gilda's Club Affiliates - www.cancersupportcommunity.org
- Local Canadian Cancer Society Chapter - www.cancer.ca

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