



CANCERcare

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Coping with Lung Cancer

When you are diagnosed with lung cancer, you may need help coping with the emotional, physical, and practical challenges associated with the disease. It is normal to feel overwhelmed, anxious, and fearful. But by communicating with members of your health care team, there are some concrete steps that you can take to help you cope.

Understanding your lung cancer

While it may be natural to search the internet and research lung cancer statistics, your health care team is best suited to answer any questions about your personal health and treatment.

Before meeting with your doctor, consider writing down questions that you may have about your treatment, side effects, and any concerns about your quality of life. Ask a friend to accompany you to take notes at your appointments so that you can review the information at a later time.

The more you know about your cancer and the available treatment options, the more likely you are to feel empowered with knowledge to make decisions that are right for you.

Get help during treatment

Lung cancer can be an aggressive disease, which means that treatment options can also be aggressive. The approach that your doctor will use for your lung cancer will depend upon the stage of the disease.

If lung cancer is caught early, surgery may be an option. Possible side effects from surgery may include pain and weakness in the chest and arm.

Chemotherapy or radiation may leave you feeling sick and lead you to wonder if the treatment is working. You may experience:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Hair loss
- Fatigue
- Dry, itchy rash
- Dry, sore throat
- Mouth sores
- Diarrhea/constipation



Smoking and Lung Cancer

Lung cancer is unique among other forms of cancer because the disease has a stigma. Since 85 percent of lung cancers are caused by smoking, it may lead some people to ask, “Did you smoke?” It is natural to find such personal questions offensive and react in anger. Consider responding by talking about how lung cancer has many causes besides smoking, including environmental factors. Turning an inconsiderate question into a teachable moment can be a very powerful means of confronting lung cancer stigma.

Some lung cancer patients continue to use tobacco products during and after treatment. Tobacco increases the complications of lung cancer treatment and may reduce the chance of treatments being effective. Although scientists are still researching smoking’s impact on overall survival, they do know that quitting can reduce the risk of developing a second cancer.

During treatment, you may find it helpful to discuss coping strategies with a professional counselor. Some patients have tried using visualization techniques such as imagining their treatment destroying cancer cells, and better tolerated their discomfort.

Inform your health care team about any side effects that you are experiencing; they will help you to manage or prevent them.

Seek emotional support

Your treatment may leave you often feeling tired. It may be frustrating not being able to do certain activities that you used to do before treatment. Knowing your limits and redefining your expectations can help reduce your frustration.

No one should face a cancer diagnosis alone. It is important to talk through your feelings. A professional counselor, such as an oncology social worker, can provide guidance and support as you cope with a wide range of emotions. A counselor can also help you manage your lung cancer diagnosis and treatment, one step at a time.

Be open and honest with members of your health care team about how you are feeling. They are important resources to help you cope throughout your care.

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.cancer.org.



Talk to your doctor to learn more about the effects of smoking on lung cancer treatment and survival. Your health care team may also have information on cessation programs if you are interested in quitting.

Get Help Managing the Costs of Cancer

Here are tips to help you cope with the financial stress of lung cancer:

- Speak with your health care providers about the estimated costs of treatment options.
- Contact your health insurance company and ask for information on the specific terms and limits of your policy.
- Ask your health insurance company to send you information on filing claims and appeal procedures.
- Contact your employer's human resources department and find out about sick leave allowance, short-term and long-term disability benefits.
- Contact major creditors and discuss general policies on deferred or extended payments.
- If you are uninsured or indigent, contact your local social services agency and file for Medicaid benefits. Contact Social Security for information on filing for Medicare.
- Speak to an oncology social worker about organizations that can provide financial assistance to cancer patients.

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