

I've just been told that I have lung cancer – how will I cope?

Being diagnosed with lung cancer can be a deeply distressing event for you and your family. Being told you have cancer can feel like your world has been turned upside down. You may react in different ways and feel different emotions. Cancer can be linked with fears about treatment in hospital, and sometimes wrongly, what it means for your future and the possibility of dying. Uncertainty about what is happening to you and what might happen can be very stressful.

You may feel differently as time passes after you have been diagnosed or during your treatment. Other people with lung cancer have talked about feelings of numbness, disbelief, shock, extreme sadness, anger, guilt, feelings of helplessness and fear. Many people find themselves looking for reasons and asking “why me?”. For others, a diagnosis of lung cancer may mean that life will never seem or be the same again.

In the early stages following your diagnosis, you may feel as though you can think of little else. Your sleep may be disturbed and you may feel very anxious. You should not worry that you are not coping. These feelings are very normal and are not signs of being unable to cope. It is entirely normal to experience a range of strong and sometimes uncontrollable emotions after a diagnosis.

You may find that some situations trigger more anxiety, for example, attending hospital appointments, reading about lung cancer in the newspaper or watching a programme on television.

Future treatments and tests may also increase your anxiety. You may notice there is a pattern to your feelings. If you notice how and when you feel them this can be the first step in starting to manage them better. Crying is a natural and reasonable reaction, so do allow yourself time to cry. It can help not to bottle up your fears and worries. Learning a relaxation technique can also be very helpful as it can help you switch off your mind from worries and also relax your body, which can then calm your mind.

“I couldn't have got through my lung cancer treatment without my wife. Looking back I was terrified at times but she helped me cope.”
Robert



How will I adjust to having lung cancer?

In the days and weeks following diagnosis, as you start to come to terms with the news, it is usual for these reactions to start to settle, although this varies from person to person. It is important that you should not be afraid to discuss your feelings and ask for support if you feel you need it. In some cases, people try to hide their emotions for fear of affecting others. However, keeping emotions bottled up often allow things to seem much worse. At first, some people find that it is difficult to talk and need some time to sort things out in their own mind. Being able to talk openly about your thoughts and feelings with others such as family, friends, your doctor or lung cancer nurse specialist, can be very helpful.

Your family may also feel worried and uncertain. Talking and sharing your feelings can help. Getting support and help with practical tasks, such as housework and shopping, can reduce the pressure on you and make family feel that they are doing something useful.

What if I feel that I can't cope with my diagnosis?

If your feelings and worries are interfering a lot with your day to day life and you are finding it difficult to cope, it may be worthwhile contacting your doctor or lung cancer nurse specialist. There are many professionals who can help with any problems you may be experiencing. Professional counsellors can provide support and help. They are also an understanding listener for someone who is anxious, troubled or distressed.

Having negative thoughts and beliefs about your health can be difficult and in some cases, may lead to depression, anxiety and a loss of self-confidence. One way of dealing with this is to keep yourself involved in activities you enjoy and give you a sense of well being. You may find it difficult to manage your fears and worries. It is understandable to be worried. Try not to let any concerns become too overwhelming or your imagination may run riot. Try to focus your mind on things which are definite rather than on the "what ifs".

"Positivity is important. But it's also okay to cry, feel scared, angry or any other way you may feel. Don't deny or pretend how you feel."

Sandra

How do I tell the children?

Talking to your children can be hard. It can seem natural to try to protect them from the news. Those closest to you may have a sense of things being different, even if they have not been told about the diagnosis. For many people things they fear and don't understand can cause extra worry than knowing what is happening.

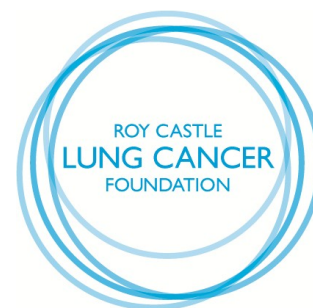
If you have young children and decide to tell them about your diagnosis and treatment, it is best to try to avoid too much medical jargon and provide information at a level that they will understand. It is surprising how well some children do cope with the news. However, others may need some time to come to terms with things.



It can be helpful to explain to children that it is normal for them to experience some strong emotions and you may notice some changes in their behaviour. It is important for them to discuss any worries with you openly. Sometimes taking them to hospital visits and introducing them to staff can help reduce some of their fears.

There are a number of very useful books, which have been written specifically for children on the subject of illness in the family. A list of reading material for children is available from Macmillan Cancer Support. (www.macmillan.org.uk)

If your child is of school age it is a good idea to tell their school teacher. This will help with any emotional or behavioural problems. If staff know what is happening they can be sensitive to any changes in how your child behaves or how they feel. If you have concerns about how your child is reacting, it may be useful to discuss it with your lung cancer nurse specialist or GP. They can make recommendations or suggest referral to a social worker or child psychologist (many hospices have these).



How will family members and friends cope with the diagnosis?

Dealing with a diagnosis of lung cancer involves not only coping with your own reactions but also the reactions of others around you. Some people may be very understanding, very helpful and know all the right things to say. Others may be over-protective, which at times can be very trying.

Sometimes, family and friends find it difficult to find the right balance between being supportive without being overly so and allowing you to remain independent without appearing uncaring. Many have possibly never had to deal with cancer before and may find it difficult to understand your situation. They may be very unsure about what to say to you and your family, or it may seem that people you know are avoiding you. Such lack of understanding can sometimes be very isolating and this can add to your distress. If you can, try to keep in touch with people who are supportive.

It is important to talk openly about your feelings and worries with people who can support you. Remember, whatever worries or anxieties you are experiencing; it is likely that your family and close friends are feeling them too.

Some people find talking to someone else who has been in a similar situation can help. You may find there are local support groups or a cancer centre where you can talk to others. There are also online forums and helpline services you can use. Services are available to let you talk either as part of a group or on a one to one. Some people find talking to someone else who has been in a similar situation can help.

GIVING HELP AND HOPE

The charity has two aims:

Supporting people living with lung cancer - Working closely with lung cancer nurses, we provide information, run lung cancer support groups and offer telephone and online support. Our patient grants offer some financial help to people affected by lung cancer.

Saving lives - We fund lung cancer research, campaign for better treatment and care for people who have lung cancer, and raise awareness of the importance of early diagnosis. Our lung cancer prevention work helps people to quit smoking and encourages young people not to start smoking.

Call us on 0333 323 7200 (option 2)

This information has been taken from the following sources:
Lung cancer—answering your questions: Living with Lung cancer 2014