

Stigma can cause stress in relationships. It can also make people feel a loss of hope, delay or stop treatment, or not seek treatment at all. If this sounds like you, please talk with someone you trust about your feelings.

For Everyone Impacted by Lung Cancer

We put people living with, and at risk for, lung cancer at the center of everything we do. From finding care to staying informed and building your resources, we are your community. As your friends, your guides, your advocates, and your support system, GO2 is your go-to.



PATIENT SUPPORT

Email us at:
support@go2.org
or
call our HelpLine at:
1-800-298-2436
go2.org

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Lung Cancer Stigma



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What Is Stigma?

Stigma is a set of negative beliefs about a behavior or condition.

A lung cancer diagnosis can bring many different feelings, but if you feel shame or blame, that is often due to stigma.

Types of stigma:

- **Perceived stigma:** You may feel this type of stigma when others say or do things that seem to blame you for having lung cancer. Their reactions often come from sadness, anger, concern, or a lack of information.
- **Internalized stigma or self-stigma:** You may feel this stigma if you have feelings of regret, guilt, or blame yourself for the diagnosis. This is more common in those who have a history of smoking or currently smoke.
- **Constrained disclosure:** This is a response to perceived and/or internalized stigma. You may not want to tell people you have lung cancer, or you may feel less like being around others.

Why Is There a Stigma on Lung Cancer?

Over the years, efforts to prevent lung cancer and teach the public about its link to smoking have resulted in negative and sometimes false viewpoints about the disease. Lung cancer became seen as something a person brought on themselves. This is not true.

Lung cancer is very complex, and we still have a lot to learn about it. Many factors increase the risk of lung cancer other than tobacco use. These include exposure to radon (a natural gas) and chemicals like asbestos and arsenic.

We know that anyone with lungs can get lung cancer.

Lung cancer is not your fault. If you have a smoking history and are dealing with feelings of guilt, remember:

- Most people with a history of smoking started young and got addicted before the brain was mature enough to understand the risk.
- Nicotine in cigarettes is very addictive, in some cases, more so than cocaine or heroin.
- We don't fully know why some people get lung cancer and others do not.
 - We know smoking greatly increases the risk of lung cancer, but most people who smoke are never diagnosed with it.
 - About 1 out of 5 people with lung cancer have no history of tobacco use.



What Can You Do About Lung Cancer Stigma?

Studies show that stigma can cause increased stress, drain your energy, lead to depression, and affect your quality of life.

Your response to stigma will likely depend on how you feel on a given day and the situation you are in. You can make a positive difference. Here are some ideas you can try:

- **Create a “teachable moment.”** Learn the facts about lung cancer and educate others.
- **Tell your story.** Give a face to lung cancer by showing it can affect anyone. This includes mothers, fathers, children, and people of all ages, religions, races, lifestyles, and those with and without a smoking history.
- **Find a healthcare team that supports you.** You have the right to compassionate care from your healthcare team. If you don't feel you're receiving it, find a new doctor or cancer center.

- **Be honest about your feelings.** If someone says something hurtful, tell them how you feel, and explain that those with lung cancer deserve the same understanding and care as those with other conditions.
- **Volunteer with GO2.** History has shown that stigma can be reduced, and we need your help.

To learn more and/or connect with others for support, call our free HelpLine 1-800-298-2436 or email support@go2.org.

