



Fox Focus on Health: Surviving Lung Cancer

By Jeff Angileri

Sep 17, 2008, 09:07 PM

[Health Home](#)
[Email this article](#)
[Printer friendly page](#)

Lung cancer kills more people than breast, colon, ovarian, and prostate cancer combined.

Despite the numbers, little is known about what causes the disease in healthy people, or how to fight it. A lung cancer survivor from Fitchburg whose trying to change that.

Susan Smedley Gerber is one of the lucky few who is still alive 10 years after battling lung cancer. She's taking a proactive approach to survivorship, and challenging herself and others to breathe free.

"I was very lucky that I got a very loud wake up call," Smedley said. "Had it not been as dramatic, I probably wouldn't be here today."

Pregnant with her first child, Susan knew something was wrong when she started coughing up blood twelve years ago. Chest x-rays came back clear. It wasn't until after she gave birth and underwent a bronchoscope that doctors discovered a tumor in her bronchial tube.

"I was lucky to have found it when we did because it doesn't respond to chemo or radiation," she said. "Surgery was the only way to get rid of it."

Susan underwent surgery immediately to remove two-thirds of her right lung. More than 10 years later, the diagnosis still baffles Susan and her doctors.

"I was 32, healthy, a brand new mom, so they had no reason to suspect cancer."

And she learned, not all types of lung cancer are caused by smoking or pollution.

"About 16,000 to 24,000 people in this country every year never smoked at all and get lung cancer," said Regina Vidaver, director of the National Lung Cancer Partnership.

And even though it's the number one cancer killer in America, experts say, people are still not as sympathetic to this disease as other cancers.

"Patients will have friends or family saying 'What did you expect? You smoked,'" said Vidaver. "We don't do that to patients of other diseases."

The negative attitude also makes money to fight lung cancer hard to come by.

"I defiantly think the stigma is a reason why the research funds aren't there as much as we want them to be," Vidaver said.

Susan is doing her part by encouraging people to visit their doctors and ask tough questions.

"If something changes dramatically, like that, it's worth checking out until you get a real solid answer," said Susan.

Trusting her instincts saved two lives - her's and her son's - born after she beat the cancer. It also saved her daughter the emotional pain of losing her mom.

This lung cancer survivor will be participating in a 5k run/walk September 27th. She's living her second chance at life by advocating for cancer patients.

Said Susan, "Any time that I can challenge myself to do things I thought I couldn't do...It's a gift."

According to the American Cancer Society, lung cancer will kill nearly 3,000 people in Wisconsin in 2008, and almost 4,000 will be diagnosed.

People with the National Lung Cancer Partnership hope to raise \$10 million to create a center in Madison to combat this disease.

There will be a "Free to Breathe" lung cancer run/walk Saturday, September 27th at Olin-Turville park in Madison. It starts at 8:30 a.m.

www.freetobreathe.org