



Maki Inada

LUNG CANCER

“During treatment, I kept working. I was teaching undergraduates and trying to run as much as possible. I was not going to take this lying down.”

I swim, bike, run and play a sport called underwater hockey. The summer before I was diagnosed with lung cancer, my husband Jeff and I hiked to the top of Half Dome in Yosemite National Park, Calif.

The winter after we moved to Ithaca, N.Y., from San Francisco, Calif., in 2007, I caught a bad cold and cough that would not go away for two months. The doctors found a large, seven-centimeter mass in my lung. They didn't believe that an active and healthy nonsmoker at age 36 could have a tumor, so they sent me home with antibiotics and asked me to come back in a few weeks. I felt better, but I still had the cough and the x-ray looked the same.

I was diagnosed with non small cell lung adenocarcinoma in March 2008. Research on Wikipedia showed that 90 percent of people with lung cancer are smokers (which I'm not), only 15 percent of lung cancer patients survive 5 years (what?!), and new targeted therapies were being developed and worked well for nonsmoking Asian women (I'm all three).

My best friend from graduate school, a pediatric oncologist at Dana-Farber, walked upstairs and was able to get me an appointment with Dr. Pasi Janne at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, who is a specialist in EGFR mutations in lung cancers and targeted therapies.

We had a surgical biopsy to have genetic testing done on the mutational status of my tumor, but the surgeon sent me away because she found tumor studs on the inside lining of my lungs and didn't operate on stage IV. Totally devastated, I returned to Ithaca to begin chemotherapy and daily Tarceva, which was only approved as a second- or third-line therapy.

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- Lung cancer takes more lives than breast, prostate and colon cancers combined—it accounts for nearly 30 percent of all cancer deaths.
- Smoking is a major risk factor for lung cancer, but between 20,000 and 30,000 nonsmokers are diagnosed with lung cancer each year in the United States.
- African-American males have the highest incidence of lung cancer and the highest death rate.
- Only 16 percent of lung cancer cases are diagnosed before they have spread, which makes treatment challenging. Median predicted survival is in the late 30s and rising.

Source: National Lung Cancer Partnership—www.nationallungcancerpartnership.org

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After three long weeks, I learned that I had an EGFR exon 19 deletion. After three months and four rounds of chemotherapy, my tumor was down to less than two centimeters. I was scheduled for surgery two weeks later. I started training to be in the best shape possible for surgery. I ran all over Ithaca.

On July 2, 2008, I had an upper left lobectomy. The surgery was a success. There was no sign of disease in the tumor studs, and the margins were an inch. Being in good shape, I walked a mile the day after surgery. I was ready to leave the hospital in just three days. In August 2009, I trained and competed in the Cayuga Lake Triathlon with my husband.

Today, we have a beautiful little girl, Mariko! I took daily Tarceva for two years post surgery and then went off to start a family. We feel very, very lucky!

Maki Inada was a patient speaker at the ATS 2010 International Conference in New Orleans, La.

