

Obtaining Life Insurance with a Health History: What You Need to Know

Applying for life insurance when you have a history of medical conditions can feel overwhelming. Many people worry they'll face higher premiums, medical exams, or outright denials, especially if they've been told in the past that their health could impact their eligibility.

The good news? Underwriting has evolved significantly over the last decade. Advances in medical science, risk assessment, and underwriting flexibility mean that more people qualify for life insurance today than ever before.

If you have a health history—whether it's heart disease, diabetes, cancer, or another condition, there are still ways to obtain the coverage you need. The key is understanding how life insurance underwriting works, what factors impact approval, and what steps you can take to improve your chances.

Understanding How Health History Affects Life Insurance

When you apply for life insurance, insurers use underwriting to determine:

- Whether you qualify for coverage.
- How much your policy will cost.
- What type of policy makes the most sense for your situation.

What Insurers Look for in an Application

Life insurance companies assess a variety of health and lifestyle factors, including:

- **Medical History** Past diagnoses, treatments, and medications.
- **Family History** Some insurers consider hereditary risk factors.
- **Current Health Status** Recent medical exams and lab results.

- **Lifestyle Factors** Smoking, alcohol use, and BMI (Body Mass Index).
- **Occupation And Hobbies** High-risk activities, such as aviation-related hobbies or occupations, scuba diving, or combat sports may impact rates.

How Your Health Can Affect Life Insurance Costs

Insurers classify applicants into different risk categories, which impact pricing. These categories typically include:

- **Preferred Plus / Preferred**
Excellent health, lower premiums.
- **Standard** Average health, moderate pricing.
- **Substandard (Table Rated)**
Higher risk, increased premiums.

Even if you don't qualify for the lowest rates, many people with a history of medical conditions still obtain coverage with the right strategy.

How to Improve Your Chances of Approval

If you have a health history, there are steps you can take to position yourself for the best possible underwriting outcome.

Getting a Pre-Assessment Through Informal Underwriting

One of the best ways to improve your chances is to work with a life insurance professional who can:

- Conduct informal underwriting with multiple insurers before you officially apply.
- Identify which companies are more likely to approve you based on their underwriting guidelines.
- Help you gather medical information upfront to avoid unnecessary delays.

Managing Health Conditions Proactively

The more stable your health is, the better your underwriting outcome. Even if you have a medical condition, insurers look favorably on:

- Regular doctor visits and medication adherence.
- Healthy lifestyle changes (e.g., quitting smoking, exercising, maintaining a healthy weight).
- Consistently good lab results (e.g., stable A1C for diabetics, controlled blood pressure for heart patients).

Real-Life Example

A 61-year-old man with coronary artery disease and a history of a bladder tumor initially received underwriting offers ranging from decline to Substandard policies with extra fees.

Because he had kept his blood pressure and cholesterol well-controlled and had no signs of malignancy in post-operative follow-ups, one carrier offered Standard rates with no additional charges. He obtained \$3 million in new life insurance coverage.

Being Honest and Transparent

Many applicants worry that disclosing their full medical history will lead to higher premiums or a denial. But not being upfront can hurt your application.

Medical exams and records will uncover health conditions, so it's always better to disclose them upfront. If you omit information, insurers may assume you're a higher risk than you truly are.

By working with an experienced life insurance firm that understands how different insurers evaluate health histories, you can position your case in the best possible light and avoid surprises.

The Application Process: What to Expect

Once you've worked with your life insurance professional to explore options through informal underwriting, you are ready to move to the formal application. The formal life insurance application process varies by insurer, but it typically includes the steps outlined below.

Initial Application & Medical Review

You'll complete an application detailing your medical history, lifestyle, and personal information. Insurers typically require a medical exam (bloodwork, blood pressure check, etc.).

Underwriting & Carrier Evaluation

The insurance company reviews your application, medical records, and lab results. Underwriting may take anywhere from a few days to several weeks or longer, depending on your health history, the policy type, and death benefit amount.

Policy Approval & Finalization

If approved, you'll receive an official offer with your final premium rates. Once you accept and pay your first premium, your coverage is active.

Many people find the process simpler than expected, especially with the guidance of an experienced life insurance professional.

Case Study: Overcoming a Complex Medical History

A 77-year-old widow needed to replace her existing life insurance policies but had a complex medical history, including breast cancer (less than two years post-treatment), obesity, and former smoking habits.

Informal underwriting offers resulted in some carriers declining coverage

entirely, while others offered high-risk classifications with extra fees.

By working with our team, she obtained \$6.5 million in new life insurance coverage at Standard Non-Smoker rates, with a temporary flat extra fee for four years.

This case highlights the importance of working with an experienced and knowledgeable team to shop policies with multiple insurance companies and leveraging industry knowledge and experience to negotiate and obtain better coverage than initially expected.

Final Thoughts & Next Steps

Key Takeaways

Having a health history doesn't mean you can't obtain life insurance. The underwriting process has changed, and more people qualify today than ever before. Proactive health management, informal underwriting, and working

with a knowledgeable and experienced team leads to better outcomes.

Different insurers assess medical risk differently - informal underwriting with multiple insurers is key.

Finding the Right Strategy for You

The right life insurance plan depends on your health, financial goals, and the strategy that best suits your needs. Whether you're looking to provide financial well-being for your family, enhance estate planning, or plan for business continuity, a well-structured life insurance policy can provide long-term confidence.

Want to explore your options? Contact us today to schedule a consultation and see what's possible.

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