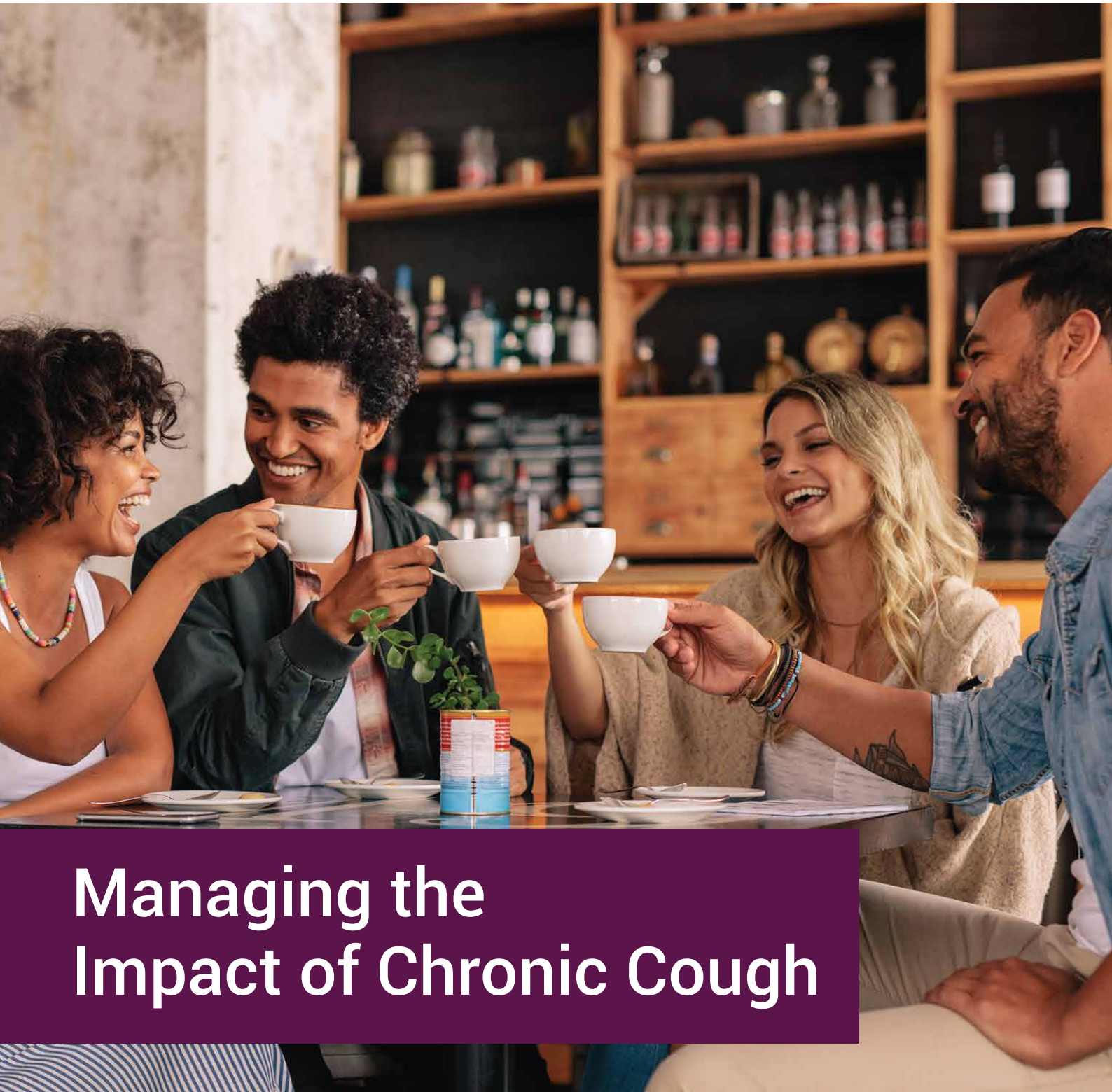


# LIVING WELL WITH CHRONIC COUGH

BY RESPIPLUS™



**Managing the  
Impact of Chronic Cough**

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL - DO NOT COPY OR DISTRIBUTE

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL - DO NOT COPY OR DISTRIBUTE

1st edition, August 2023

ISBN 978-1-989791-44-8 (PDF)

This guide is also available in PDF on our portal:

<https://chroniclungdiseases.com/en/resources/chronic-cough>

## Module: Managing the Impact of Chronic Cough

Do you have a cough that just won't go away? You may be suffering from chronic cough, or cough hypersensitivity. This condition can impact all parts of your daily life including your physical, social and emotional well-being.

### What is chronic cough?

Chronic cough is any cough lasting more than 8 weeks in an adult.

When a cause for your cough has been ruled out, or if it has been treated, and you're still coughing there may be something you can do about it. Managing chronic cough and the impact that chronic cough has on daily life is possible.

In this module, you will be given information, strategies, tips, and resources that can help you find relief from your chronic cough. Some of the most helpful treatments involve changing behaviors that may be contributing to your cough.

The Living Well with Chronic Cough program has been designed to promote and facilitate the management of your condition on a day-to-day basis.

# Managing the Impact of Chronic Cough

## Welcome

With Living Well with Chronic Cough, you will learn skills that can help you to adopt a healthy new lifestyle and behaviors. This program was designed so that you can choose what is important to you, and for you to go through the information at your own pace. You may go through the learning modules from beginning to end, or move to the topics that are the most important to you. You can share them with people close to you so they can understand what you are going through and support you in the learning process.

The information provided in this module is designed to help those whose cough has been investigated, and either an underlying cause has been eliminated or treated.

When you have a cough that lasts more than 8 weeks, it is important to see your doctor. Your doctor will investigate your symptoms, and order the appropriate tests (chest x-rays, breathing tests, and blood tests, among others) to eliminate the more serious causes for your cough.

Living Well with Chronic Cough means understanding your cough, identifying your triggers, and managing your symptoms using different strategies and techniques to live a healthy and fulfilling life.

If you have any of the following symptoms in addition to your cough, you should ask your doctor to investigate them:

- feeling unusually ill, tired or generally unwell
- night sweats
- difficulty swallowing
- coughing up blood
- recent unexplained weight loss.

If you have abnormal bloodwork, please check with your doctor to ensure that your cough and the blood abnormalities do not represent a more serious cause for your cough.

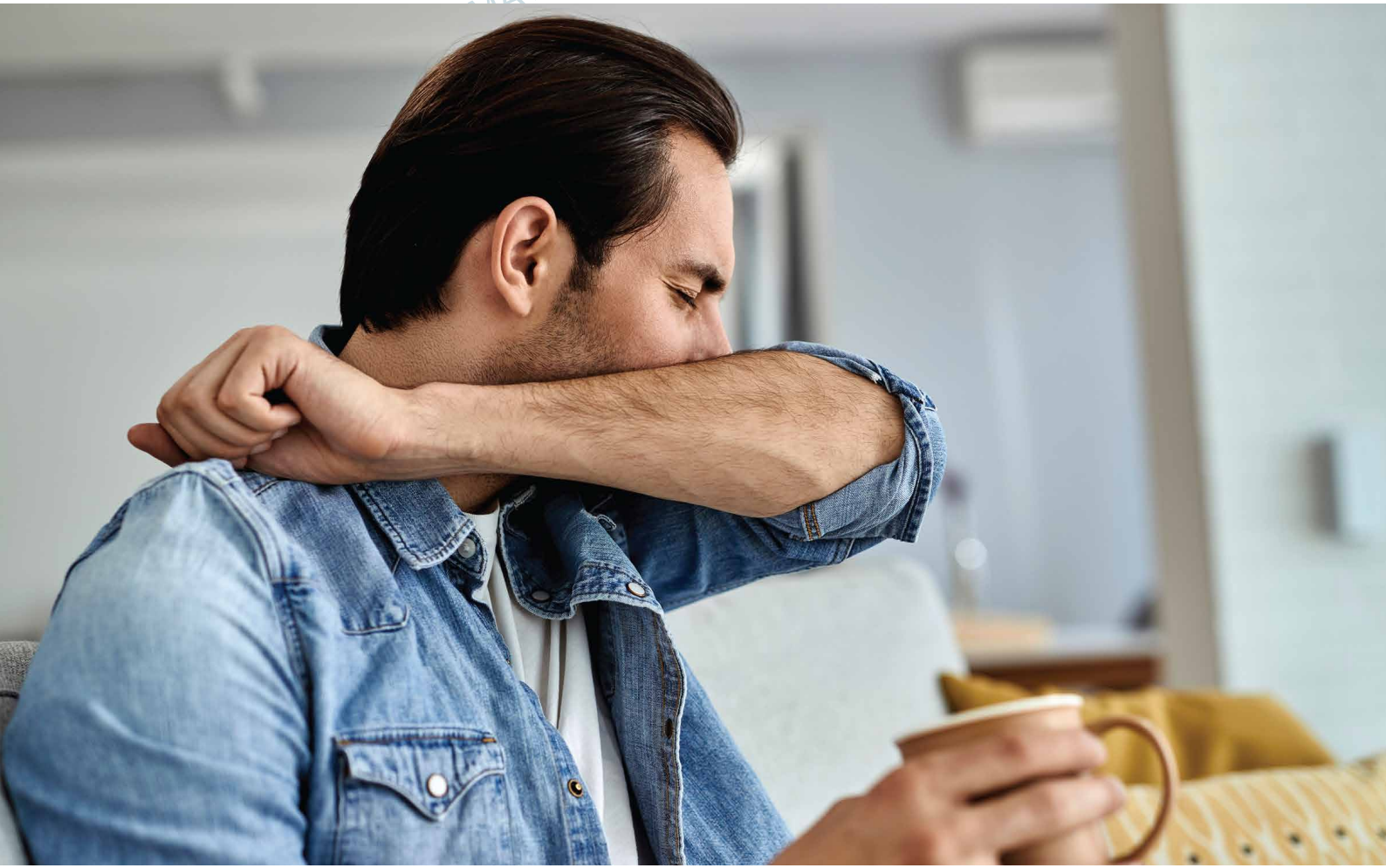
Eliminating more serious causes for cough means you should also have a normal chest x-ray and normal breathing tests. If you have not had these two tests, ask your doctor to arrange testing. These tests are a typically done when looking for a cause for your cough.

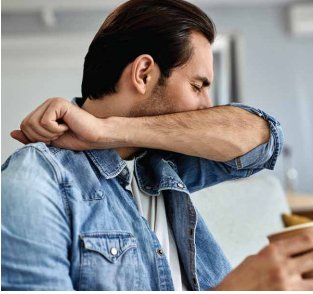
# Managing the Impact of Chronic Cough

## Table of contents

• Understanding Your Cough.....	1
• Getting to Know Your Triggers.....	3
• Managing Your Triggers.....	4
• Non-Medication Interventions.....	6
• Speech Pathology Treatment.....	8
• Other Management Strategies.....	10
• Cough Suppression Techniques.....	11
• Reducing Irritation.....	13
• Breathing Techniques.....	15
• Other Devices and Therapies.....	18
• Healthy Lifestyle.....	19
• Dealing with Stress and Anxiety.....	20
• Managing Chronic Cough in Your Daily Life.....	28
• Nutrition and Chronic Cough.....	32
• Sleep and Chronic Cough.....	34
• Exercise and Chronic Cough.....	37
• A Patient's Story.....	39
• Testing Your Confidence Level And Setting Objectives.....	41
• Setting Goals and Planning Ahead.....	43
• The Integration and Maintenance of Your Program.....	44
• Helpful Resources.....	45
• Glossary.....	46

# Understanding Your Cough





## Understanding Your Cough

# Understanding Your Cough

If you haven't already, you can start paying attention to the details of your cough.

### What is "the urge to cough?"

Many people will have a sensation somewhere in the throat or chest before a cough. This is called the "urge to cough", and you'll need to pay close attention to it so that you can learn to try and manage it when it happens.

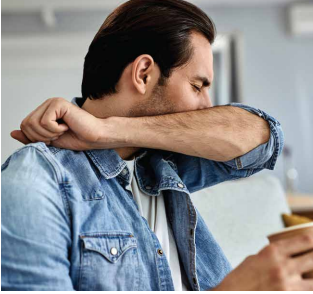
Do you notice some situations that repeatedly cause you to have the urge to cough? If yes, describe them here:

### What is the difference between an *intentional* and an *unintentional* cough?

- An *intentional* cough is one that you do on purpose in response to a sensation, such as a tickle or itch in the throat. If you have time to inhale, or think, before the cough, then it is an intentional cough.
- An *unintentional* cough is one that catches you off guard without warning.

Try your best to pay attention to what types of coughing tends to happen most. The intentional coughs are the ones you can learn to manage the fastest.



## Understanding Your Cough

# Getting to Know Your Triggers

### What are some causes and triggers of chronic cough?

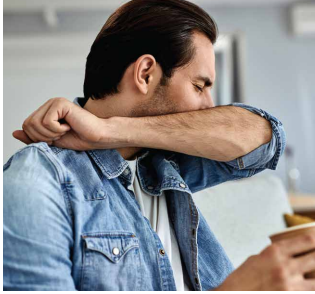
The table below lists some of the many causes and/or triggers of chronic cough:

If you are suffering from chronic cough, it is important to try and identify what could be causing or triggering it.

Causes of chronic cough
Some types of blood pressure medications (for example Angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors)
Respiratory infections
Occupational Exposure
Allergies

Triggers of chronic cough
Smoking
Body positions
Air conditioning or cold air
Humidity
Exercise or shortness of breath
Food, alcohol, and overeating
Swallowing
Stress, anxiety, and emotions
Scents, perfumes, and odors
Using your voice (talking, singing, shouting, laughing)
Environment (dust, smoke)
Postnasal drip (when excess mucus builds up and drips down the back of your throat)
Acid reflux (also known as <b>heartburn</b> )
Unpleasant sensations (urge to cough, itch, tickle, irritation, congestion in throat/chest)





# Understanding Your Cough

## Managing Your Triggers

Learning about what triggers your chronic cough can help you to:

- reduce and manage your exposure to certain triggers
- change your behavior (including education, using specific strategies to suppress your cough, vocal hygiene training, and psychoeducational counselling)
- decide with your doctor on the right treatment options

Here are some examples of how you can try and manage some causes/triggers of cough



Trigger/Cause	Management
Environment	Avoid places with dust, smoke, pollution, strong odors.
Smoking	Talk to your doctor about smoking cessation programs to help you quit.
Allergies	Identify with an allergist what you are allergic to, so you can avoid these allergens. Medications like antihistamines may be prescribed.
Rhinitis (postnasal drip)	You can consult an ENT (ear, nose and throat doctor). They can identify possible causes (allergies, polyps, viruses, sinusitis) and suggest pharmaceutical and non pharmaceutical (e.g., saline nasal rinses) treatments, and possibly surgery). Also, exercise, cold air and spicy foods can sometimes trigger postnasal drip.
Acid reflux (GERD)	Lifestyle and diet changes can help. Speak to your doctor: both prescription and over the counter medications are available to treat acid reflux.
Food	Avoid alcohol, spicy foods, caffeine, and overeating.



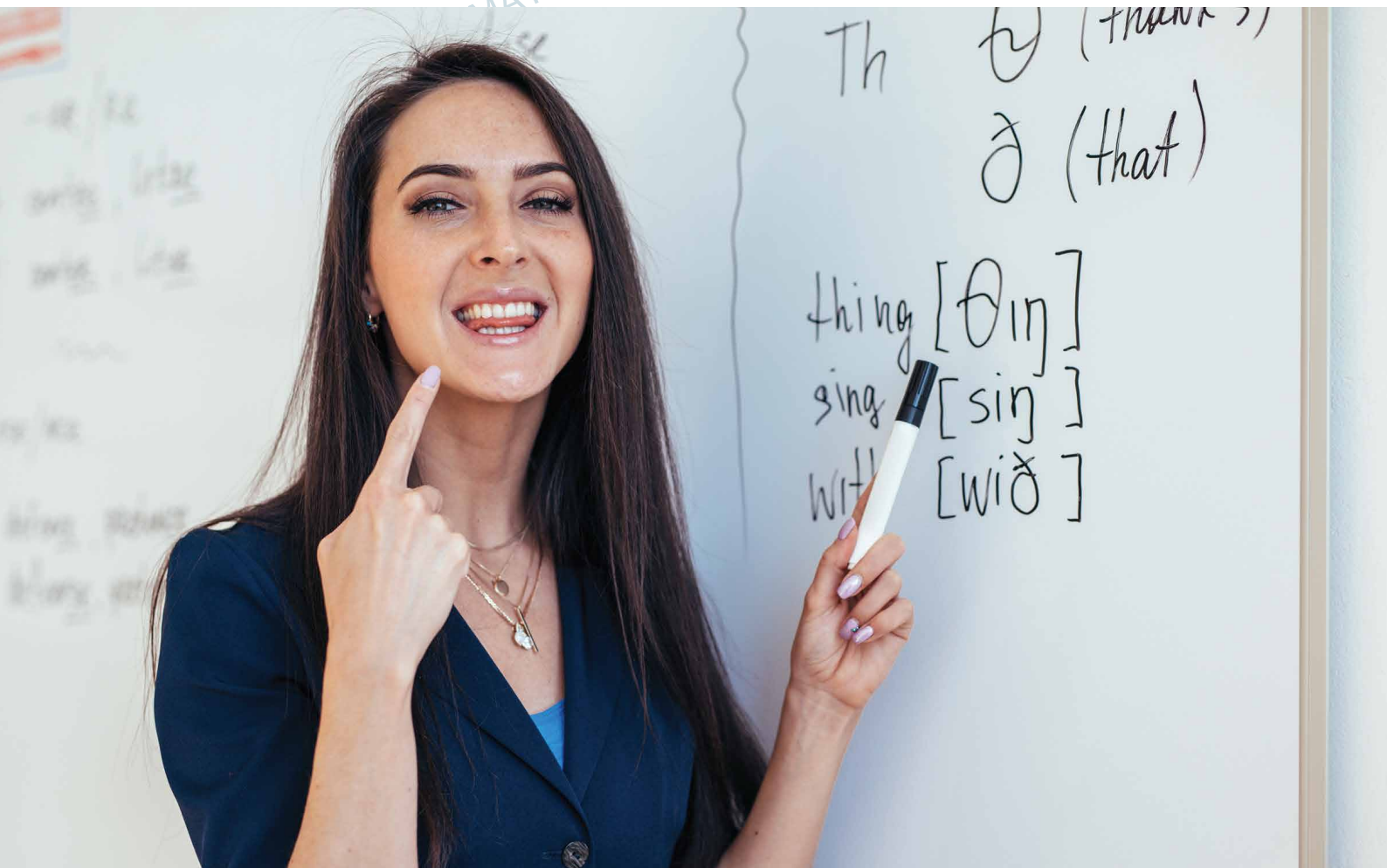
## Understanding Your Cough

## Managing Your Triggers



Trigger/Cause	Management
Body positions (e.g., lying flat on your back)	You can raise the head of your bed using blocks, purchase adjustable beds, and/or you can prop yourself up with pillows.
Unpleasant sensations (Feeling like something is stuck in your throat or a tickling sensation)	Try sipping water with lemon or honey. You can also try sucking on non-medicated, non-menthol lozenges. Wearing a mask can sometimes help too.
Blood pressure medications (ACE Inhibitors)	You can speak to your doctor or pharmacist about which blood pressure medication you take and if you can try switching to another.
Respiratory infections	Some respiratory infections require medications such as antibiotics to treat. If your symptoms are worsening speak to your doctor. If your cough persists beyond 8 weeks, the following suggestions in this module may be helpful. Wear a mask, wash your hands and get vaccinated to help prevent respiratory infections (e.g., COVID-19, pneumonia, influenza, RSV, etc.)
Occupational exposure	Identify any potential exposure to irritants and stressors (even a certain co-worker) in your workplace and try to avoid them.

# Non-Medication Interventions







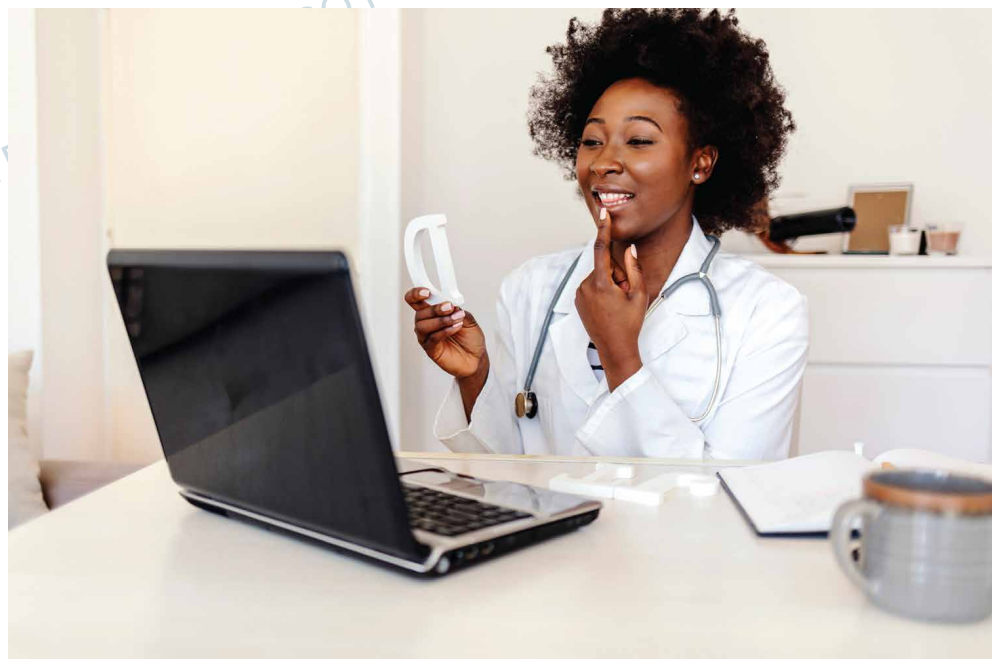
## Non-Medication Interventions

# Speech Pathology Treatment

## Who is a good candidate for Speech Pathology Treatment?

A SLP will ask you to describe your journey with chronic cough and identify any possible triggers. You are a good candidate for speech pathology treatment if:

- There is no identifiable cause for your nonproductive cough. You suffer from a vocal cord dysfunction (your vocal cords do not function normally) along with your cough.
- Your cough is triggered by abnormal sensations (tickle/itch/irritation/congestion/feeling something is stuck) in your throat or by laughing, singing, talking, exertion, smoke, perfume, strong odors, dry foods, throat tightness and dryness.
- You have a persistent cough despite seeing a doctor or specialist and getting treatment for asthma, post-nasal drip and acid reflux.





## Non-Medication Interventions

# Speech Pathology Treatment

## How can speech pathology treatment help me control my cough?

A SLP will ask you to describe your journey with chronic cough and identify any possible triggers. Speech pathology treatment can help you control your cough by:

- 1. Education:** Speech pathology can help you understand:
  - your cough reflex
  - the nature of your cough and the vicious cycle of cough and irritation.
- 2. Give you increased control over your cough:** Speech pathology treatment can help you increase your ability to voluntarily control your cough. It may be possible for you to control your cough even though you feel the irritation or “tickle” building in your throat. You can try and control or suppress a cough when you feel the need.
- 3. Reduce irritation that triggers coughing:** Therapy can reduce the amount of irritation in your throat and airways. As irritation builds up to a certain level, you cough. If you can reduce that irritation, you may cough less. The more you can lesson the rate of irritation the less likely a cough will be triggered.
- 4. Desensitization:** An SLP may work with you to slowly re-introduce potential triggers and help you practice managing them.
- 5. Voice Therapy:** In many cases, making small but meaningful changes in the way you use your voice may help to reduce irritation and, when talking is a trigger to your cough, reduce coughing with voice use.



## Non-Medication Interventions

### Other Management Strategies

#### Certified Respiratory Educators (CREs)

Certified respiratory educators (CREs) are healthcare professionals who specialize in respiratory care and have additional training and certification in patient education. CREs play an important role in treating chronic cough by providing you with education, support, and a personalized treatment plan. Treatment plans developed with CREs can include medication, lifestyle changes, quitting smoking identifying triggers, and help to manage other conditions that can worsen chronic cough.

#### Behavioral Strategies for Managing Chronic Cough

These strategies can be taught by SLPs and CREs and other healthcare professionals in the field of chronic cough management.





## Non-Medication Interventions

# Cough Suppression Techniques

Cough suppression techniques may help increase your ability to voluntarily control your cough

Before learning cough suppression techniques your SLP or CRE might ask you to learn to recognize and rate your urge to cough using a scale like the one below.

**What do you feel before you need to cough?  
Can you recognize the feeling of needing / wanting to cough?**

Urge to Cough scale	
0	Nothing at all
0.5	Very, very weak (just noticeable)
1	Very weak
2	Weak
3	Moderate
4	Somewhat strong
5	Strong
6	
7	Very strong
8	
9	
10	Very very strong (almost maximum)





## Non-Medication Interventions

# Cough Suppression Techniques

Once you are able to recognize and rate your urges to cough you can then try to suppress your cough with the following technique:

### The Hard Swallow

Do the hard swallow at the very **FIRST** sign of cough, or when cough rating reaches 2 or above.

- a. At the very first sign of a cough, tickle, or urge to cough do a purposeful swallow:
  - i. With your hands pushed together, and
  - ii. With your head down towards your chest
- b. This swallow can be performed:
  - i. As a dry swallow
  - ii. With water, or
  - iii. With a non-medicated/non-menthol lozenge or candy

There will be times when you just cannot control or suppress your cough. In these cases, try and cough as little as possible. When you cannot seem to stop coughing:

- Try **VERY HARD** to take a long, deep breath through your nose (trying to keep the inhale going, even if very slow and shaky)
- Try to swallow **HARD**
- Try drinking water
- “Hold” your swallow



## Non-Medication Interventions

# Reducing Irritation

## Techniques to Reduce Irritation That Triggers Cough

Irritation will trigger your cough once it has built up past a certain level.

How can you reduce irritation that triggers cough?

You can try and reduce irritation in your throat and airways by:

### 1. Hydrating

- Drink at least 1.5L (6-8 glasses) of water every day to reduce throat dryness.



### 2. Concentrating on how you are breathing

- Having good posture is important to open your airways and relax your throat. You can learn to sit and stand with your back and neck straight with your chin slightly tucked in.
- Avoid bad posture which can put pressure on your throat, vocal cords and neck leading to irritation and vocal strain.
- Breathing through your nose can prevent your throat from getting dry. It warms, cleans, and humidifies the air before it reaches your throat and vocal cords.
- Check in with how you are breathing. Is your belly moving out when you breathe in or does your upper chest move? See the description of diaphragmatic breathing on page 15.





## Non-Medication Interventions

### Reducing Irritation

#### Techniques to Reduce Irritation That Triggers Cough

##### 3. Taking care when talking



If your throat does get irritated, here are some strategies to soothe that irritation or the “tickle” in your throat:

- Sip and swallow
- Sip warm liquid
- Swallow honey
- Chew gum
- Suck non-menthol / non-medicated lozenges or candies
- Gargle warm water

- Try to not shout, grunt, scream. You can irritate your vocal cords by laughing, singing or talking too loudly.
- Do not whisper as this increases the pressure around your vocal cords and can irritate your throat.
- Use a natural voice when speaking.
- Cold and dry air can irritate the airways and make you cough. Try wearing a scarf or mask over your mouth when going outside in cold, dry conditions.
- Suppress your cough as much as possible and stop clearing your throat excessively. If you have trouble noticing you are clearing your throat, ask someone to remind you every time you do this. When you cough and clear your throat, you put a lot of pressure on your throat and vocal cords.

##### 4. Practicing Good Laryngeal Hygiene

- Hydrate
- Use a humidifier when sleeping
- Do not smoke and avoid harmful fumes
- Try to avoid caffeine, alcohol and medicated throat lozenges and antihistamines that can dry out your throat
- Maintain a healthy diet and make changes if necessary to avoid acid reflux
- Exercise



## Non-Medication Interventions

### Breathing Techniques

#### Belly Breathing (or diaphragmatic breathing)

Belly breathing simply means breathing using your diaphragm (the main muscle used for breathing located just above your stomach). It can help you relax and reduce cough.

1. Stand, sit or lie down comfortably in a quiet place.
2. Close your eyes and loosen any tense muscles. Make sure to relax your shoulders.
3. Place one hand on your upper chest and another on your belly button.
4. Breathe in slowly through your nose for three seconds. Feel your stomach expand. Your chest should remain still.
5. Breathe out slowly through your mouth for three seconds. Feel your stomach move back.
6. Repeat steps 4 and 5. Gradually increase the time you take to breathe in and out. Four seconds in and four seconds out, five seconds in and five seconds out...





## Non-Medication Interventions

### Breathing Techniques

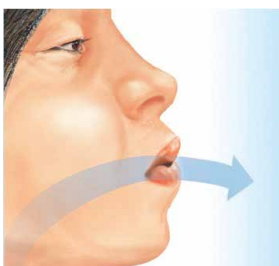
#### Pursed Lips Breathing Exercise for Cough



1. Inhale slowly through your nose.



2. Purse your lips as you would to whistle.



3. Exhale slowly while keeping your lips pursed.

1. Close your lips as if you were whistling. Breathe in and out against the lips' resistance. Be sure no air is coming in and out of the nose. You need to make it slightly difficult to breathe.
2. If at any point you feel dizzy, stop and try again when the feeling passes.
3. Try to do this 10 times a day (practice will help you to get used to this new strategy).
4. If helpful, gently hold the nose.
5. If helpful, hold a finger up to the lips, and blow against the finger.
6. You may explore short, rapid breaths or long slower breaths to see which works best for you.
7. Use this breathing technique to prevent and interrupt cough.
  - a. Use this breathing technique when you become aware of sensations in your throat that occur before a cough starts.
  - b. If a cough starts, use pursed lips breathing immediately.
  - c. If a cough breaks through, use all of your available energy and continue interrupting the cough again and again, using the technique.
  - d. Use gentle pursed lips breathing in situations where you feel vulnerable to a cough starting.
8. As you prevent and interrupt coughs, the coughing episodes may become less frequent, shorter, and less severe.



## Non-Medication Interventions

# Breathing Techniques

### Stacked Sniff Technique for Cough

This exercise is designed especially for reversing laryngospasms (spasms of the vocal cords), and can be helpful for cough.

1. To start off, try and relax as much as you can. Try and breathe with your belly. You will feel anxious if you are short of breath.
2. After a normal exhalation, take 4 or 5 sniffs through your nose without breathing out between sniffs. You are stacking the sniffs one on top of the other.
3. Now when you breathe out, make sure your tongue is flat against the floor of your mouth. Making the “SSS” sound will force your tongue to the floor of your mouth.

### Use this breathing technique to prevent and stop a cough:

- Some people with cough also experience laryngospasm which means that your vocal cords close when you breathe in. It becomes difficult to get air into your lungs. You may also make a wheezing sound when you breathe in. This is called stridor. This exercise can be quite helpful for episodes of laryngospasm.

Have you tried any of these breathing techniques? If so, which ones have worked best for you? Is there a particular time during the day when they work best?



## Non-Medication Interventions

### Other Devices and Therapies

Specific devices used for chronic cough may vary depending on the underlying cause of your cough.



#### Oscillatory Positive Expiratory Pressure (OPEP) Device for Chronic Cough

An OPEP device is a drug free, chest physiotherapy device, that can help loosen mucus in the lungs, making it easier to cough up. Patients with a productive chronic cough who are **struggling with clearing mucus** can use an OPEP device. OPEP devices are not for everyone with chronic cough. This device is most commonly used in patients suffering from bronchiectasis (a chronic lung condition that causes the walls of the airways to permanently widen). It is frequently caused by inflammation and infection. It results in extra mucus accumulation.

CBT is a type of psychotherapy that focuses on changing negative thought patterns and behaviours.

#### Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) for Chronic cough

When your chronic cough is caused by a tic, a habit, or has a psychological reason behind it, CBT can be helpful.

CBT for chronic cough will involve challenging your negative thoughts surrounding your cough (like fear of coughing in public or your cough being a sign of a serious illness). You may also learn relaxation techniques that can help reduce your anxiety and urge to cough.

More research is needed to identify which patients with chronic cough will benefit the most from CBT and demonstrate how effective CBT is in helping with chronic cough. This area is still being explored as a viable option to help treat chronic cough. Consider speaking to a professional trained in CBT to explore this option.

The device and therapy listed on this page have not been proven helpful to chronic cough sufferers in research studies, but can be considered in individual cases. Discuss these strategies with your doctor.

# Healthy Lifestyle

MATERIAL - DO NOT COPY OR DISTRIBUTE







## Healthy Lifestyle: Living Well with Chronic Cough

# Dealing with Stress and Anxiety

Stress is a part of everyday life—and even more so when trying to manage a condition like chronic cough. This is especially true following the COVID-19 pandemic, because coughing in public can cause a lot of stress and anxiety to chronic cough sufferers. While it is normal to feel anxious about your chronic cough, you must take care to not let yourself be pulled down by negative emotions.

Living Well with Chronic Cough means learning how to control your reactions to stressful situations in your life. It means clearly communicating your needs, maintaining a positive attitude, and learning to relax.

In this section we will explore:

- Identifying stressors
- Stress reactions
- Understanding your anxiety response
- How to break the anxiety cycle
- How to reduce stressors
- Relaxation techniques



## Healthy Lifestyle: Living Well with Chronic Cough

# Dealing with Stress and Anxiety

## Identifying Stressors

Stressors are events in our everyday life that requires us to make an adaptation or change.

Here are some examples of common stressors faced by people with chronic cough that force them to make changes in their everyday life:

### Personal:

- Change in self esteem
- Change in financial status
- Change in habits (sleep, nutrition, exercise and smoking)

### Work, daily activities and environment

- Loss of job, disability
- Work related stress
- Isolation
- Fatigue
- Being in public places

### Family and social network

- Stigma, embarrassment
- Separation
- Sexual difficulties

Can you think of any situations that cause you stress on a daily basis? If so, describe them here.

---

---



## Healthy Lifestyle: Living Well with Chronic Cough

# Dealing with Stress and Anxiety

## Stress Reactions

**Fear** is a normal reaction to present danger.

Symptoms: increased heart rate, shallow rapid breathing, sweating and muscle tension.

### How do you react to stressful situations?

You can react in different ways when facing stressful situations. Your reaction may have an impact over the way you cope with them.

Here is an example to a fear reaction:

If you suddenly start coughing and can't stop and are unable to catch your breath your fear response could be to call an ambulance and get to the hospital as soon as possible.

**Anxiety** is a reaction that involves constantly worrying and anticipating stressful situations.

Symptoms: similar to fear

Here is one example of an anxiety reaction:

A person suffering from chronic cough has a severe coughing fit during an outing. He may begin to feel anxious whenever he begins to think about going out again and may even begin to avoid all outings.

**Panic attack** is an exaggerated, irrational, and often sudden fear or anxiety reaction.

Learning to manage your stress allows you to function at a higher level and to feel more satisfied with life despite the problems you may be facing.



## Healthy Lifestyle: Living Well with Chronic Cough

# Dealing with Stress and Anxiety

## Understanding Your Anxiety Response

What do you do when you experience a coughing fit?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Do you have negative thoughts about this situation? If so, what are they?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How does your body react when you are anxious? Describe your symptoms.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What do you do when you are anxious?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Can you think of other actions that would help you to better cope with this situation in the future?

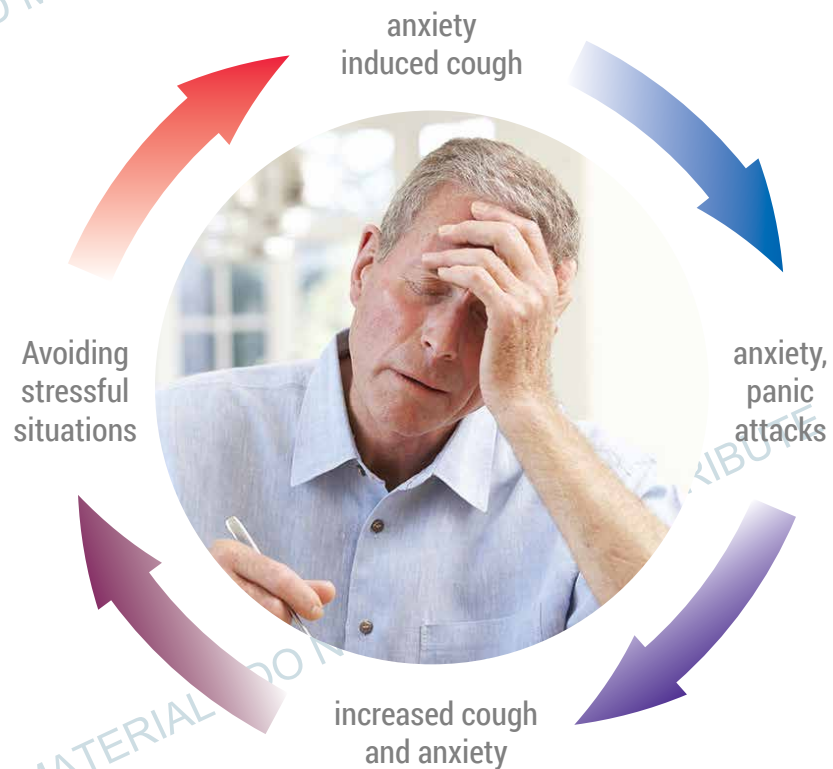
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## Healthy Lifestyle: Living Well with Chronic Cough

# Dealing with Stress and Anxiety

## How to Break the Anxiety Cycle



- **Recognize your fears.**  
Understanding what makes you anxious is the first step to controlling your reaction. Try to not be too hard on yourself, and think of yourself as being weak and afraid.
- **Examine and investigate your fears.**  
Some of the beliefs you grew up with may be causing your fears. Ask yourself: Are they based on things that have happened or things you fear may happen?
- **Do not worry about future events.**  
Anxious people tend to dwell constantly on possible negative outcomes and expect the worst. Try to stay focused on the present.



## Healthy Lifestyle: Living Well with Chronic Cough

# Dealing with Stress and Anxiety

### How to Break the Anxiety Cycle

- **Instead of worrying, plan your actions in advance whenever possible.**  
You will be less anxious if you are prepared to deal with stressful situations.
- **Do things you enjoy.**  
Reserve room for pleasurable activities in your day.
- **Try to solve one problem at a time.**  
Trying to make too many changes at once could make you feel overwhelmed.
- **Let yourself make mistakes.**  
For most problems there are several possible solutions. If you do not succeed at one thing, try again, taking a different approach if needed.
- **Maintain a positive attitude.**  
Your mental health could improve along with your problem solving ability. A negative outlook can block your ability to think clearly and prevent you from finding solutions to your problems.
- **Learn to relax.**  
You can learn different techniques you will find in this module to try and help you relax.
- **If you feel uneasy, ask questions and find answers.**  
Do not hesitate to talk to people close to you or a healthcare professional about your feelings and your conditions.
- **If you feel paralyzed by your fears, do not hesitate to consult a health professional.**  
Working with a professional can help you develop better coping skills.



## Healthy Lifestyle: Living Well with Chronic Cough

# Dealing with Stress and Anxiety

### Stressors

Something that makes you worried or anxious.

When you learn to manage stress and reduce stressors, your overall health and happiness can improve.

### How to manage Stressors

Below are some tips that can help you manage stress and reduce stressors:

1. **Make a list:** Make a list of the things that are causing you stress. Then order them from most urgent to less urgent. This can help you identify the stressors to focus on first.
2. **Practice relaxation techniques:** Relaxation techniques like the ones in this module can help.
3. **Exercise:** Regular exercise can help boost your mood. Guidelines suggest 150 minutes per week.
4. **Eat a balanced diet:** Eating a healthy balanced diet of fruit, vegetables, protein and whole grains can help manage stress.
5. **Sleep:** Sleep is very important to help manage stress. Aim for 7-8 hours of quality sleep a night. If you are having trouble sleeping, speak to a health professional who may provide you advice on sleep hygiene or prescribe medication to help you sleep.
6. **Stay in touch with friends and family:** Staying connected to friends and family can help you feel less stressed.
7. **Get professional help:** Talk to a mental health professional if you are feeling overwhelmed and cannot cope on your own with the stressors in your life.

It is important to remember that managing stress and reducing stressors does not happen overnight. Be patient and do not give up.

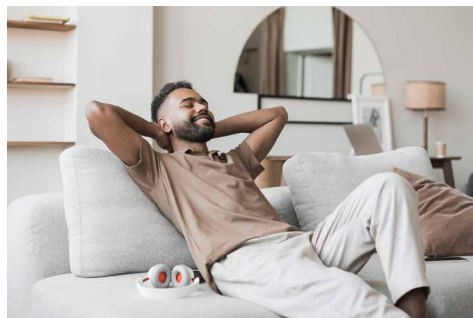


## Healthy Lifestyle: Living Well with Chronic Cough

# Dealing with Stress and Anxiety

## Visualization Exercise

- Concentrate on a positive image
- Begin to relax
- Use all your senses (i.e. sight, sound, touch, taste and smell) to make your image seem more real. For example, if you are visualizing yourself on a cruise, see the clear blue sky, the sparkling water and the wonderful scenery
- End this visualization exercise by retaining your image
- Try and do this exercise once a day



## Progressive Relaxation

- Find a quiet and comfortable place to sit or lie down
- Start by tensing a specific muscle group (like your hand or your foot) for several seconds
- Release the tension and allow the muscles to completely relax
- Repeat this process with different muscle groups in your body, working upwards from your feet to your head.

Other techniques, such as the breathing techniques mentioned earlier in this module can also be used as a method to help reduce stress.





## Healthy Lifestyle: Living Well with Chronic Cough

# Managing Chronic Cough in Your Daily Life

## Urinary Incontinence

Urinary incontinence is the unintentional leakage of urine.

Chronic cough puts pressure on your pelvic floor muscles and can weaken them over time (especially in women). These weakened muscles are not able to support the bladder anymore and urinary leakage can happen when laughing, sneezing, coughing or any activities that puts pressure on your bladder.

## Management

To help manage urinary incontinence from chronic cough here are some tips:

- **Pelvic floor exercises (Kegel exercises):** Pelvic floor exercise can help strengthen the muscles around your bladder. By regularly doing these exercises you can reduce urinary leakage. There are physiotherapists who specialize in pelvic floor exercises.
- **Absorbent pads or panty liners:** Pads and pantyliner products can be found at any pharmacy and worn discreetly under your clothes to absorb leaks.
- **Try different coughing techniques and positions:** Certain positions and coughing techniques can put less pressure on your bladder when coughing therefore reducing leaks.
- **Timed Voiding:** To help avoid involuntary leakage of urine when coughing, timed voiding means emptying your bladder on a regular schedule rather than waiting for it to be full.
- **Talk to your doctor:** Your doctor can help you manage urinary incontinence related to chronic cough and suggest different treatments that may work for you.

Your daily life can be significantly impacted by chronic cough. Read on for examples of issues that can come up in your daily life with chronic cough and how to manage them.



## Healthy Lifestyle: Living Well with Chronic Cough

# Managing Chronic Cough in Your Daily Life

## Coughing in Public

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, coughing in public can be very stressful. People around you may think you are contagious, and you might feel embarrassed or self-conscious.

### Management

- **Cover your nose and mouth when coughing:** Cough into your elbow or a Kleenex.
- **Step away from others:** If you feel like you are going to cough, move away from people if possible before you start coughing.
- **Explain your situation:** If you feel comfortable, it can be helpful in a situation like a meeting or on a plane to explain that you have chronic cough.
- **Bring water or throat lozenges/cough candy:** By sipping water or sucking on lozenges you can help soothe your throat and prevent a cough.
- **Practice cough avoidance techniques:** Cough avoidance techniques like the ones found in this module may help when you feel the urge to cough.



Are there any other strategies that have helped you?  
If yes, describe them here.

---

---



## Healthy Lifestyle: Living Well with Chronic Cough

# Managing Chronic Cough in Your Daily Life

### Physical Discomfort

Chronic cough can cause physical discomfort such as sore throat, chest pain, and fatigue.

### Management

- **Drink plenty of water:** Drinking water can help soothe a sore throat and keep your body hydrated.
- **Use a humidifier:** Using a humidifier helps keep the air moist and can reduce throat irritation along with nasal congestion and secretions.
- **Avoid excess humidity:** Try taking a bath instead of a shower. Sometimes too much humidity can trigger a cough.
- **Identifying and avoiding your triggers** can help decrease coughing.
- **Good sleep hygiene:** Practicing good sleep hygiene means trying to go to bed at the same time most nights and creating a relaxing bedtime routine. Try to avoid screens (for example cellphones) before bed, and reduce any light or stimuli where you sleep. A good night sleep can help with fatigue during the day.
- **Over the counter medications:** Using non-medicated and non-menthol throat lozenges can help with a dry irritated throat. Medications like over the counter pain relievers can reduce some of the physical discomfort (pain) caused by chronic cough. Pain from cough and the use of pain medications should be assessed by your doctor on an individual basis.
- **Education:** Learning about your condition is important to understand that chronic cough is a real illness. It does NOT mean you have a severe underlying disease or problem.



## Healthy Lifestyle: Living Well with Chronic Cough

# Managing Chronic Cough in Your Daily Life

### Living in a Smoke Free Environment

If you inhale cigarette smoke, the lining in your airways can get irritated, inflamed, and produce more mucus triggering a cough. Smokers will often have a chronic cough.

Smoking and cigarette smoke are one of the most common triggers for chronic cough.

If you do **not** smoke, it is important to avoid environments with cigarette smoke because it can trigger your cough.

If you **smoke**, quitting smoking is the best thing you can do for your health, including reducing chronic coughing and other respiratory conditions.

You can find the module **Live Well Smoke Free** within our series **Living Well with COPD**. This module can help to teach and guide you on your journey to quitting smoking when you are ready.

### Living Well Smoke Free

By RESPIPLUS™





## Healthy Lifestyle: Living Well with Chronic Cough

### Nutrition and Chronic Cough

Certain foods like dairy, caffeine, acidic and spicy foods can make coughing worse in some people. So, it is important to identify which foods can trigger your cough and try your best to avoid them.

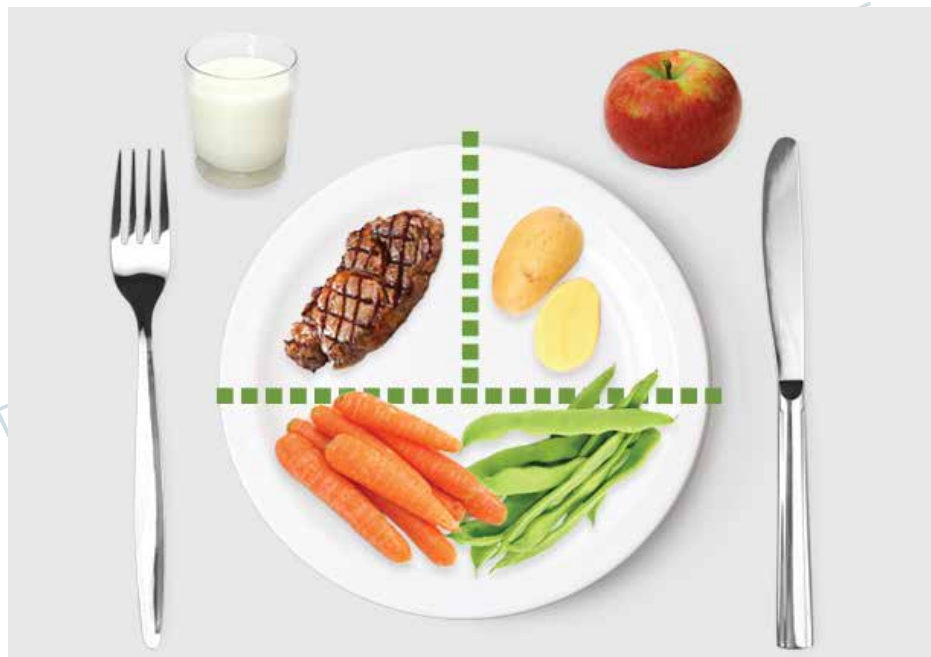
If you are unsure what a healthy body weight is for you, speak to your doctor or healthcare professional who can help you figure it out.

It is also important to maintain a healthy body weight. A cough caused by acid reflux is common in patients who are overweight.

#### What does a healthy plate look like?

To achieve and maintain good health, using the healthy plate to build your menu can keep you on target for a healthy balanced diet.

A healthy balanced diet is essential for everyone and especially those with a chronic condition like chronic cough.





## Healthy Lifestyle: Living Well with Chronic Cough

### Nutrition and Chronic Cough

Ideally make sure that:

- $\frac{1}{2}$  your plate is filled with vegetables (source of fiber, antioxidants, vitamins and minerals)
- $\frac{1}{4}$  of your plate contains meat and substitutes (source of protein, fat and iron)
- $\frac{1}{4}$  of your plate contains grain products or starch (source of fiber and energy)
- Ideally make sure that you complete your plate with a dairy/or dairy substitute and/or a fruit if you are still hungry.

If you would like more information on healthy eating, the Government of Canada website has a healthy food guide. <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>

Nutritious snacks (like yogurt, cheese, whole grain crackers, nuts, fruit and milk) can fit into your diet and help fill you up and give you energy between meals.

You can speak to a or a registered dietitian to help you build a healthy plate and suggest healthy snacks. They can also adapt your diet to avoid trigger foods that could be causing your cough and help you maintain good health at the same time.





## Healthy Lifestyle: Living Well with Chronic Cough

### Sleep and Chronic Cough

Everyone benefits from a good night's sleep.

If your chronic cough is caused by an underlying condition or trigger, it is important to treat the condition and/or eliminate the trigger to help stop the nighttime cough.

Sleep disturbances can occur when you suffer from chronic cough. Coughing may wake you up at night and can be loud and persistent.

Here are some suggestions to help you get a good night's sleep:

- Raise the head of the bed by putting blocks up to 6 inches under the front legs to reduce acid reflux and post-nasal drip. Some beds will be powered to allow you to raise or lower the head of the bed. Propping your head up with pillows may also help.
- Keep your bedroom adequately humidified especially if you suffer from a dry irritated throat, nasal congestion and /or postnasal drip
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol and any food that triggers your cough before bed
- Maintain a regular sleep schedule and routine
- Relax before going to bed. Do your relaxation techniques, take a soothing bath, listen to music
- Avoid any triggers like cigarette smoke and irritants
- Use breathing techniques for chronic cough like the ones shown in this module





## Healthy Lifestyle: Living Well with Chronic Cough

# Sleep and Chronic Cough

Putting Sleep Problems  
to Rest

### Goal:

- To get a good restful sleep

### Benefits:

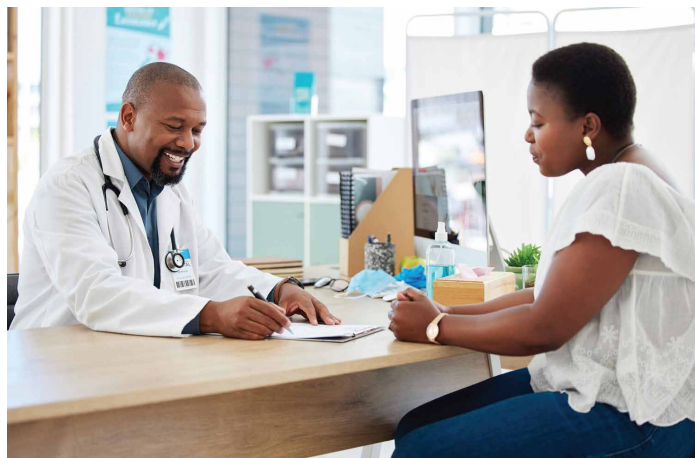
- 1 Restores daytime energy
- 2 Improves the ability to think clearly
- 3 Reduces anxiety

### Points to remember:

- Many people have trouble sleeping at one time or another
- There is no “correct” amount of sleep
- Every person sleeps for a period of time that is healthy for them

If you are still having trouble sleeping because of your cough and feel tired during the day, talk to your doctor.

Your doctor can help figure out what underlying conditions and triggers might be causing you to cough at night and treat the problem.







## Healthy Lifestyle: Living Well with Chronic Cough

Although dealing with fatigue related to chronic cough can be a challenge, there are things you can do to help manage it.

### Sleep and Chronic Cough

#### Dealing with Fatigue and Chronic Cough

Chronic cough can cause physical and mental exhaustion and prevent you from getting a good night's sleep.

Here are a few suggestions to help manage your fatigue:

1. Get plenty of rest. Lack of sleep can result in fatigue. See previous section in this module on Sleep Disturbances and Chronic Cough to help you get a good night's sleep.
2. Stay hydrated and eat a healthy balanced diet.
3. Take breaks and pace yourself. If coughing is making you tired, taking short breaks during the day can help you recharge.
4. Practice breathing and relaxation exercises to help manage stress and anxiety.
5. Prioritize your activities.
6. Plan your schedule.





## Healthy Lifestyle: Living Well with Chronic Cough

### Exercise and Chronic Cough

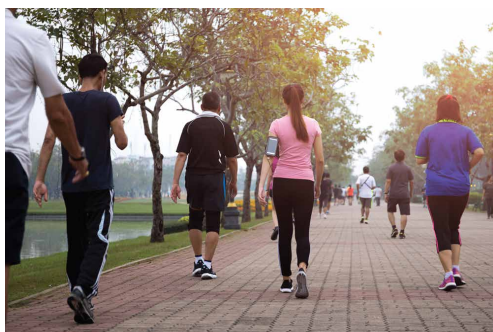
For some, chronic cough does not affect their ability to exercise, for others, chronic cough is a problem because it can trigger them to cough.

#### The benefits of exercise

Exercise and physical activity benefit your heart, body, and mind.

Regular exercise can help you to:

- reduce the risk of several health problems (cardiovascular disease, obesity, osteoporosis, stroke, colon cancer, premature death and type 2 diabetes)
- increase your strength and tolerance to effort
- control your anxiety
- improve your quality of life





## Healthy Lifestyle: Living Well with Chronic Cough

### Exercise and Chronic Cough

Here are some tips for exercising and staying active with chronic cough:

1. **Talk to your doctor or healthcare professional:** they can help you adapt an exercise program for your medical condition and help determine what exercises are safe for you.
2. **Avoid environmental factors that can aggravate your symptoms:** factors like extreme heat, cold, dry air, humidity, smog, and strong winds can you to cause cough.
3. **Make sure to warm up and choose low impact activities to start:** you can warm up with light stretches and breathing exercises. Activities like walking and cycling are considered low impact and have great health benefits without being too hard on your body.
4. **Drink plenty of water:** it is important to drink before, during and after exercise with chronic cough. It can help keep your throat moist and prevent cough.
5. **Learning to recognize your limits:** always listen to your body. If you experience chest pain, intense joint pain, dizziness, heart palpitations, headaches, severe prolonged breathing difficulties or are unable to control your cough while exercising; **stop immediately** and rest. Contact your doctor or health care provider.



## A patient's story: Living with Chronic Cough

Let us hear the story of Sara, 51 years old

As a young girl, I had some breathing issues. Back then you did not have a nebulizer available for use at home and you needed to travel to hospital for treatments. At that time, it was decided that I had asthma. There was no actual testing done (like spirometry) but I was started on inhaled corticosteroids and salbutamol off and on for the next 30 years or so.

Around the age of 38, my cough started to get worse. Luckily, I had recently started to work with a respirologist in a spirometry clinic. During one of our clinic days, I had a coughing "fit or attack". The respirologist said, "Oh my goodness, what is that?". We then proceeded to do spirometry testing and low and behold, I do not have asthma. From there, we did a "methacholine challenge" test, CT scan of the chest, allergy testing, immunoglobulin testing, blood work (including tests for autoimmune disorders)...all were normal.

During the years before this day, I continued trying inhaled corticosteroids, rescue inhalers and nasal sprays. They gave some relief, but minimal, unless I had a chest infection.

I was referred to a specialized clinic (Cough Clinic), where they repeated some of the tests listed above and also included a sputum induction and more in-depth blood work. And long story short, the final diagnosis was that I have "a neuropathic cough with an increase in epithelial cells in the sputum".

## A patient's story: Living with Chronic Cough

Let us hear the story of Sara, 51 years old

My new treatment's objective was to try to control the cough at night, with the thought that it may be helpful to give the airways/nerves time to rest. I tried two different medications that are usually used for nerve pain and to this day I still use one for sleep.

Every single day, I will have multiple attacks. I have found that tepid water, lozenges and some breathing techniques have helped. I, like many others with chronic cough, am searching every day for something else to help. I have even tried some naturopathic and homeopathic treatments, which again do provide some relief but not a cure.

Like many of you reading this, who also suffer from chronic cough, it can be an extremely fatiguing, frustrating, embarrassing and frightening journey. I know my major triggers (smoke, dust, perfumes, stress) and try to avoid them as much as possible, but we do have to continue to live our lives, so knowing how to somewhat control the cough is important.

The good news is, a significant amount of research and knowledge are being put into finding ways to help us. Many of the strategies that I am using today are listed in this module. We share them with you in the hope that they will also be able to help you.

# Testing your confidence level

On a scale of 1 to 10, circle the number that best represents the confidence that you have in your ability to apply the strategies and techniques taught in this module.

1. I feel capable to control my reactions when facing stressful situations

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
not at all confident very confident

2. I can manage other conditions and disease that may impact my chronic cough

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
not at all confident very confident

3. I feel capable to use the breathing techniques taught in this module

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
not at all confident very confident

4. I feel capable to use the relaxation techniques taught in this module

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
not at all confident very confident

5. I feel capable of leading a healthy lifestyle (nutrition, sleep, physical activity, etc.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
not at all confident very confident

6. I feel that the strategies taught in this module can help me better manage my chronic cough

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
not at all confident very confident

## Testing your confidence level

If you feel confident in managing your condition, continue to apply the strategies and techniques taught in this module during your daily activities.

If you do not feel confident managing your condition, what are the reasons?

---

---

What could you do to feel more comfortable using the techniques and strategies taught in this module?

---

---

## Setting Goals and Planning Ahead

You have learned new skills to better understand and manage your chronic cough symptoms. It is important to establish a plan by writing down your objectives (the small steps are as important as the big ones!) and the time to achieve them.

**My goals to better cope with chronic cough for the next month:**

1.
2.
3.

Are you confident that you can follow your plan to better manage your chronic cough for the next month?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
not at all confident								very confident	

**My goals to better cope with chronic cough for the next \_\_\_ months:**

1.
2.
3.

Are you confident that you can follow your plan to better manage your chronic cough for the next \_\_\_ months?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
not at all confident								very confident	

Notes:

---

---

\_\_\_\_\_  
Patient's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Healthcare Professional's Signature

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



# The Integration and Maintenance of Your Program

Take the time to review your objectives and your plan...

**Which objectives have you been able to attain?**

---

---

**How did you manage to attain these objectives? What strategies have worked for you?**

---

---

**Are there any objectives you have not yet attained? Which ones?**

---

---

**What could help you attain your objectives?**

---

---

Notes:

---

---

## Helpful Resources

[Chronic Cough | Canadian Lung Association](#) is the leading patient organization in Canada working to promote lung health and prevent and manage lung disease.

### Chronic-Cough Canada

[chronic-cough.ca](http://chronic-cough.ca) aims to improve the quality of life for patients living with chronic cough. They hope to achieve their vision by providing patients with the best clinical care and by researching chronic cough.

### The Calgary COPD & Asthma Program

<https://ccapalberta.ca/your-lung-health/chronic-cough/> is an Alberta Health Services program. They are a team of certified respiratory educators and respirologists that strive to be a leading centre in Canada working with patients and other health care professionals in treating asthma, COPD, tobacco reduction, and chronic cough.

### American Thoracic Society (ATS) Patient Information Series

The ATS is the world's leading medical society dedicated to accelerating the advancement of global respiratory health through multidisciplinary collaboration, education, and advocacy. The ATS Patient Information Series and Public Health Information Series now include more than 100 fact sheets on topics in pulmonary, critical care and sleep.

Cough: <https://www.thoracic.org/patients/patient-resources/resources/cough.pdf>

Vocal Cord Dysfunction:

<https://www.thoracic.org/patients/patient-resources/resources/vocal-cord-dysfunction.pdf>.

### The American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA)

<https://www.asha.org/public/speech/disorders/chronic-cough/> is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for members and affiliates who are audiologists; speech-language pathologists; speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology support personnel; and students. Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) identify, assess, and treat speech, language, and swallowing disorders.

## Glossary

**Antioxidants:** are compounds that help prevent damage to our cells by free radicals. Free radicals can harm our cells and cause problems like cancer. Antioxidants can be found in foods like fruits, vegetables, nuts, and whole grains.

**Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT):** is a type of therapy that helps people understand the connection between their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The main idea behind CBT is exploring how our thoughts (negative and positive) can influence how we feel and act.

**Laryngeal Hygiene:** refers to habits and routines that help keep your larynx (or voice box) healthy and working properly. The larynx is important because it is responsible for producing sound (voice) and protecting our airways.

**Nutritionist/Dietitian:** a healthcare professional that specialized in nutrition. They are trained to provide qualified guidance, advice and personal dietary recommendations to people or groups to promote health, prevent disease and manage specific health conditions.

**Occupational Exposure:** refers to being exposed to things or substances in the workplace that could be harmful to your health.

**Oscillatory Positive Expiratory Pressure (OPEP) Device:** is used to help loosen mucus in the lungs. When you blow into the device, it creates a positive pressure that helps open or expand the airways. The oscillations (or fluttering effect) will help loosen and clear mucus, secretions and irritants from the airways making breathing easier.

**Osteoporosis:** is a medical condition that causes a loss of bone density and strength, leading to an increased risk of broken bones.

**Pelvic Floor:** is made up of muscles, ligaments, and connective tissue that form a supportive “hammock” like structure at the bottom of the pelvis. It supports the pelvic organs (bladder, rectum, and the uterus in women) and plays a very important role in maintaining control over bowel, bladder and sexual function.

**Sleep hygiene:** is a set of habits or routines that help with sleep quality and amount.

**Stressors:** can be things, situations or even people that can cause us to feel stress or worried, overwhelmed or upset.

**Urinary Incontinence:** is the involuntary loss of control of your bladder that causes leaking urine. It can range from mild to severe and can happen only sometimes or more often.

**Voiding:** Emptying the bladder of urine.

# Acknowledgements

Living Well with Chronic Cough was developed in consultation and collaboration with groups of healthcare professionals, educators, and patients from across Canada.

## Authors and Reviewers of the 1st Edition:

Diane Conley, RRT, CRE, CTE • Maxime Cormier, MD, FRCPC • Stephen Field, MD.CM, FRCPC • Emily Horvat, BSc • Alan Kaplan, MD, CCFP(EM), FCFP, CPC(HC) • Sara McRae, B.A., RRT, CRE • Katrina Metz, RRT • Janet Philpott, RRT, CRE, CTE • Imran Satia, M.A MB, BChir (cantab), MRCP, PhD • Maria Sedeno, BEng, MM • Kim Smith, MMus, MHSc, SLP Reg. CASLPO

## Collaborating Organizations:

- Canadian Thoracic Society (CTS)
- RESPTREC

An initiative of



**LIVING WELL WITH**  
CHRONIC COUGH  
BY RESPIPLUS™

Sponsors



“Living with chronic cough is frustrating and exhausting. But I've learned to manage my symptoms by identifying my triggers, doing breathing techniques, and using a humidifier at night. Staying hydrated and getting enough rest also helps. It's not easy, but with perseverance and the help of this module, I'm able to overcome my cough and enjoy my daily activities.”

- David, 46