Living Well with COPD™



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Managing Your Stress & Anxiety

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The skills you need to manage your COPD

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD, is a disease that can seriously affect every part of your life. As the disease progresses, it can take a toll on your daily activities. Fortunately, there is a lot that you can do to try and manage these limitations and improve your well-being. This is why we have created this series of workbooks on COPD self-management.

How can this program help me with the self-management of the disease?

This module is part of the Living Well with COPD program. It is an educational program in which you learn skills to help manage your disease and adopt healthy new lifestyle behaviours. The Living Well with COPD program has been tested in several clinical trials and the results were very encouraging. Patients who used these workbooks in collaboration with their healthcare worker, "case manager" or resource person and physician had fewer exacerbations requiring hospitalizations or emergency room visits. Their quality of life has also improved, enabling them to do more of the activities they enjoyed, and better cope with their disease.

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National and international guidelines agree that self-management education is extremely valuable for individuals with COPD. The Living Well with COPD Self-Management Program, which you can adapt to your own situation, was created by medical experts in collaboration with COPD patients.

This is your guide. Use it to write down your questions or concerns. Share it with people close to you so that they can understand what you are going through. Discuss whatever thoughts and feelings you have with your case manager or resource person and your physician.

Good luck with your program!

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Welcome to the "Managing Stress and Anxiety" of the Living Well with COPD series

Stress is a part of life – and even more so when you are living with a chronic illness like COPD. While it is normal to feel anxious about the changes COPD brings to your life, try and take care not to let yourself be pulled down by negative emotions.

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

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Managing Your Stress & Anxiety

Identifying stressors in your life

Living Well with COPD means learning about what kind of things make you anxious, how well you respond and how to better cope with stress.

Stressors are events or situations in everyday life that require us to make an adaptation or change.

Here are some examples of common stressors faced by people with COPD that require them to make changes in their lifestyle.

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Personal:

- Personal illness/handicap
- Change in self-esteem
- Change in financial status
- Change in habits (sleep, nutrition, exercise, smoking)

Work, daily activities and environment:

- Change in ability to perform activities of daily living (dressing, showering, grocery shopping, cleaning)
- Loss of job, disability leave, retirement
- Moving to a new house or apartment

Family and social network:

- Separation/divorce
- Sexual difficulties
- Illness or death of spouse, family member or friend
- Conflicts with family members or friends

Stress refers to the physical and psychological reactions that a person experiences when faced with **stressors.**



Stress Reactions

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

Fear is a normal reaction to a present danger.
Symptoms: increased heart rate, shallow, rapid breathing (which is similar to the shortness of breath of COPD), sweating and muscle tension.

Here is one example of a fear reaction:

If you suddenly become seriously ill and you are unable to breathe, your fear response could be to call an ambulance and to get to the hospital as soon as possible.

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Anxiety is a reaction that involves constantly worrying and anticipating stressful situations.
Symptoms: The symptoms are similar to those of fear.

Here is one example of an anxiety reaction:

A person suffering from COPD has had a very severe episode of shortness of breath during an outing. They may begin to feel anxious whenever they 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 may allow you to function better and to feel more satisfied with life despite the problems that you may be facing.



Understanding your anxiety response

What is one stressful situation that you are dealing with these days? Are you anxious about this situation?

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

What do you do when you are anxious?

Knowing what to do and planning ahead in potentially stressful situations may help you to reduce your anxiety level.

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The Anxiety-Breathlessness Cycle (or the ABC)



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Managing your anxiety

Managing your anxiety is also very important when preventing and reducing shortness of breath.

- The main symptom of COPD is shortness of breath.
- Shortness of breath can cause anxiety and even panic attacks.
- Anxiety makes you breathe faster, which increases your shortness of breath and as a result, you become more anxious.
- Many COPD sufferers choose to stop doing activities because of their fear of dying from breathlessness.
- The less you do, the harder activities become, because you are not in as good shape.You will experience more fatigue, shortness of breath and anxiety.
- This is the Anxiety-Breathlessness Cycle (or ABC).

The feeling of being short of breath in someone with COPD causes a lot of stress and anxiety. You may feel like you have lost complete control of your body. That is a very different feeling than someone who is healthy and is short of breath from exercising for example.

When you have COPD, nothing will make shortness of breath go away completely. However, regularly practicing the techniques taught in this module can help you to try and cope better with your anxiety and shortness of breath.

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How to break the Anxiety-Breathlessness Cycle

- Recognize your fears. Understanding what makes you anxious can be the first step in learning to control your reaction. Try not be too hard on yourself.
- Look at how fear can affect your thinking. Some of the beliefs that you grew up with may be causing your fears. Ask yourself: Are my fears based on things that have happened or on things I am afraid could happen?
- Try to focus on the here and now. Anxious people can tend to dwell constantly on possible negative outcomes and expect the worst. Focus on the present if you can.
- Plan your actions in advance. You may be less anxious, knowing that you are prepared to deal with stressful situations that may come up.
- Enjoy doing the things you love. Take the time for pleasurable activities in your day.
- Try to solve one problem at a time. Trying to make too many changes at once can make you anxious.
- Accept that you might make mistakes. For some problems, there may be number of possible solutions. If you do not succeed at one thing, you can always try again, taking a different approach if you think it may help.
- Try to keep a positive attitude. Your mental health can improve along with your problem-solving ability.

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How to break the Anxiety-Breathlessness Cycle

- Laughter. Having COPD is certainly not fun. But, being able to laugh can help reduce your stress and help you connect with others.
- Relaxation. You can try using the relaxation techniques that you will be learning in this module.
- If you feel uneasy, ask questions. Do not hesitate to talk to the people close to you about your feelings and your condition.
- If you feel frozen by your fears, you can try consulting a mental health professional. Working with a professional can help you develop better coping skills. A mental health professional can help you undertand if your anxiety is caused by shortness of breath or something else.

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Dealing with everything by yourself can be difficult

List the name(s) of the people who help you with your disease.

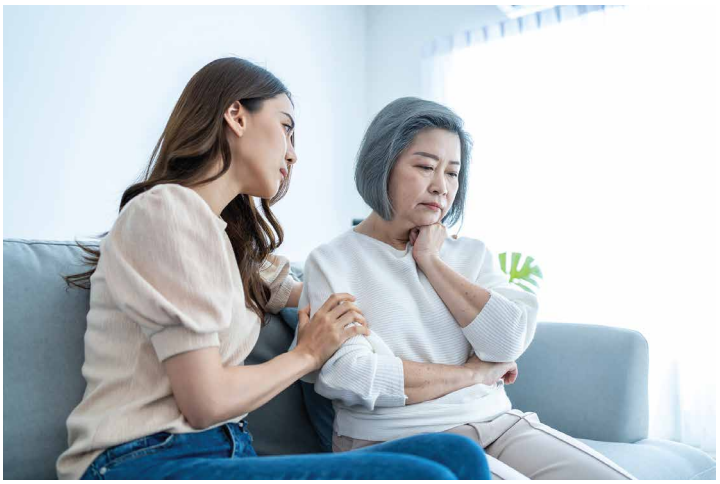
Who helps you the most?

Are there any health services or organizations in your area that could help you?

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Remember:

- Try and talk about your problems so they don't pile up.
- You can ask for help.
- It is ok to express yourself.





Assertive Communication

How do you express yourself?

Basically, there are three ways to react. You can react:

- Aggressively
- Passively
- Assertively

Imagine yourself in the following situation:

Your friend wants to go out dancing, but you do not feel well enough to go. Your friend does not believe you and says that you look fine. You feel angry with your friend, who has no idea what it is like to be in your situation.

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How would you react?



Now let us look at some typical scenarios:

Aggressive Reaction	Results
You say, "Why don't you just go and leave me alone!"	• When you lose your temper, your friend feels attacked, perhaps unloved, misunderstood and probably angry. The result is a strain on the relationship. • You become anxious. • You feel short of breath.

Passive Reaction	Results
You do not say anything and agree to go out, even though you know it is too much for you.	• Your friend may be pleased that you agreed to go out, but will also be aware of your passive mood and therefore may not enjoy the evening as much. Your friend may be frustrated with you even though you agreed to their wish. • You become overtired. • You lose your self-respect and your self-confidence.

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Now let us look at some typical scenarios:

Assertive Reaction	Results
You say, "I appreciate that you want to go dancing with me. I would love to go dancing, and it makes me sad that I can't go. But I know that if I go, I won't be able to do all the other things I have to do over the next few days. Please ask me again when I'm feeling stronger."	• Your friend may be frustrated that you are refusing to go out, but knows your reasons. You have left the door open to discussing the problem and to finding a compromise. • Your friend now understands how you feel and might suggest another activity that both of you can do later. • You have expressed your feelings and respected your friend's desire to go dancing. • You are proud of yourself. • You take this opportunity to do something else. • You save your energy.

Try to think of some other situations in which you need to clearly express yourself (assertive reaction). Remember, the more you practice, the better you can get at it.

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In this module you have been taught some of the ways you can manage stress, fear and anxiety

Are there any needs you would like to talk about that have not been covered?

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Remember:

- Even when you learn to manage stress, fear and anxiety a little better, some days can be harder than others. This is normal.

Also, learning to relax may give you more physical and mental energy.



Relaxation Techniques

What do you do to relax?

What do you think relaxation can do for you?

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Goal:

- To relax your body and quiet your mind.

Benefits:

1. Help you feel more in control of your emotions.
2. Slow down your breathing.
3. Decrease muscle tension.
4. Reduce stress and anxiety.

For full details on Deep Breathing technique, see Appendix page 19.



Relaxation Techniques

People can picture different images. One way to think of them is as "mental movies" running through your mind. These images can be of persons, places, things or accomplishments and they can be positive or negative. For example, it is common for people who suffer from chronic illnesses to be preoccupied with thoughts of how they used to be and everything that they have lost.

It can be easy for people to forget that they still have many fulfilling things in their lives.

Negative, stressful thoughts use up energy and make you feel tired.

What do you think will happen if you picture yourself as being afraid and hopeless?

What do you think will happen if you picture yourself as being strong and capable?

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You will probably feel happier or more confident.
As you can see, images can be powerful.

Various relaxation techniques will be explored on the Appendices section.

For additional help, you can consider joining a support group people living with COPD. The Lung Health Foundation has a National Support group : https://lunghealth.ca/support-resources/virtualand-call-in-support-group/.

You could even try starting your own support group and meet others in your community who are going through a similar journey with COPD.



Let us hear the story of Judith

When I was first diagnosed with COPD 4 years ago, I had a lot of stress, anxiety, and fear. I did not know what my future would look like with COPD. I don't think those feeling will ever go away completely, but they are better now. Understanding more about what COPD is has helped me. Learning different breathing techniques like pursed lip breathing helps me to relax to some degree as well. I think it is important to find things you enjoy that can help you relax. I like listening to music. It relaxes me. I find coloring books help me to focus on things other than anxiety, so I like doing that.

Just as important as finding something to help me relax was trying to limit my exposure to things that could stress me out. During the pandemic I was isolated at home. I would put the news on and keep it on all day. Listening to all the news about how COVID-19 was spreading throughout the world was scary. After a while, I decided to only listen to the news once a day and it helped a lot with my anxiety. You can't necessarily avoid everything that could cause stress and anxiety, so I think seeking help from a mental health professional can be useful.

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Now test your confidence level in managing your stress and anxiety

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. To identify stressors in your life?

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

2. To control your reactions when facing stressful situations?

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

3. To express your needs assertively?

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

4. To maintain a positive attitude?

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

5. To use relaxation techniques?

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

6. To use the strategies and techniques taught in this module to better manage your stress and anxiety?

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

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Now test your confidence level in managing your stress and anxiety

If you feel confident to manage your stress and anxiety, continue to apply the strategies and techniques taught in this module.

If you feel that you are not able to manage your stress and anxiety, what are the reasons?

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

With practice and patience, you can succeed.

If you have tried using the techniques in this module and still have a lot of stress and anxiety related to your COPD, you may want to schedule a visit with your doctor. There are medications that can be prescribed to help you manage your stress and anxiety.

Appendices



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Deep Breathing

Deep breathing (diaphragmatic breathing) technique:
You will be more relaxed if you close your eyes and think about a quiet place or the word "calm".

- Put one hand on your abdomen (stomach).
- Take a full breath.
- Feel your abdomen inflate. Push your abdomen out as much as possible when you are inhaling. This will help your lungs fill up with air.
- Exhale through your mouth while keeping your lips pursed (as if you were about to whistle).
- Feel your abdomen returning to its normal position.
- Wait after each exhalation until you are ready to take another full breath.
- After a few times, you will find your own rhythm. For example: one deep breath for 5 normal breaths.

If you start feeling dizzy, take a few normal breaths before starting again.

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Remember:

- Take your time.
- Practice is the key to putting yourself in a more relaxed state.



Visualization Techniques

Positive thinking

In this technique, you focus your attention on a positive mental image.

Think of what you already have, what you have the power to improve in your life, and what could make you happier.

Describe your image.

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Negative Thought Stopping Technique

If you find your mind constantly straying to negative thoughts and images, you can try another visualization technique called Negative Thought Stopping Technique.

Combination Exercise

Combining techniques such as Positive Thinking and Deep Breathing can be help to calm and refresh your mind and body.

Positive Thinking

- 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 remembering your image.
- Do these exercises once a day.



Negative Thought Stopping Technique

Negative Thought Stopping Technique:

- Recognize that you are dwelling on something negative.
- Imagine a big stop sign and tell yourself to "Stop!"
- Switch the negative image to something pleasant and relaxing.

Repeat the steps as needed until the negative thoughts go away.

(From "Getting Your Life Back" by Jesse H. Wright, M.D. p. 147)

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Combining techniques

To watch a demonstration of these relaxation techniques, you can visit the following website at: https://youtube.com/watch?v=T-sPM4uVpVc&t=22s.

Deep Breathing (Diaphragmatic Breathing) and Positive Thinking

- Make yourself comfortable, either by lying down or by sitting in a chair. You can use a relaxation tape CD or a relaxtion app on a device like a phone or tablet for this exercise.
- Now close your eyes. Take a full relaxing breath. Imagine a warm sensation filling your body. Continue to take full relaxing breaths. Feel the warmth flowing through the tips of your fingers … in your hands … in your arms …
- Now feel the warmth filling your neck, head, chest and stomach … As you relax, feel the warmth reaching your hips, thighs, legs and feet. Now your entire body feels relaxed.
- Your body is resting comfortably. Keep taking full relaxing breaths. Let your mind wander and imagine yourself walking in a beautiful meadow …
- Take a full breath. Smell the crisp grass and wild flowers. Look at the flowers across the grass.
- Feel the tall grass on your legs. Take a full breath. Fill your lungs with clean air. Let all the tension leave your body when you breathe out. Feel a soft wind. Feel calm and peaceful. Hear a bird singing in the distance. Feel the peacefulness and beauty of the scenery. You should feel calm, happy, peaceful and relaxed.
- Take a full breath. Say the word “calm” every time you breathe out. If your mind starts to wander, concentrate on the word “calm”. Tell yourself that you are “calm”.
- Now that you are calm, you are more in control of your movements, your gestures, your thoughts and your feelings. You are more in control of your body.
- Now you are ready to end this relaxation exercise. Open your eyes. Look around and sit up straight. Slowly stretch your arms and legs, and enjoy the feeling of being profoundly relaxed.

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Acknowledgements

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The power to manage a chronic disease successfully is in your hands. The Living Well with COPD program has been used around the world for the past 20 years. It has been translated to 14 languages, and its effectiveness has been attested in over 40 publications in peer-reviewed medical journals. Developed in collaboration with groups of health professionals, educators in COPD and COPD patients.

"This program has demonstrated a very positive impact on patient's health, as well as an important decrease in the frequency of hospitalizations and emergency room visits."

J. Bourbeau, respirologist
McGill University Health Centre

"A trend to increase the autonomy of the patient in the management of its own medical situation… I saw an invitation to get involved… We are moving towards an extremely important shift in the relationship between the patient and the doctor."

H. Tremblay, expert patient

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