

# Living well with... COPD™

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease

*A Learning Tool for Patients and Their Families*

## Managing Your Stress & Anxiety

- Identifying the Stressors in Your Life and Understanding Your Reactions
- Breaking the Anxiety-Breathlessness Cycle
- Stating Your Needs in a Clear, Assertive Way
- Integrating Relaxation Exercises
- Applying Rules to Live a Healthier Life

This guide belongs to:

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## The skills you need to manage your COPD

COPD is a disease that can seriously affect every part of your life. Simple activities you once took for granted, such as taking a walk or getting dressed, can become major challenges. Flare-ups, or worsening symptoms – the main cause of hospitalization in people with COPD – can further affect your quality of life. Fortunately, there is a lot that you can do to overcome and prevent 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 self-management of the disease?

This is an educational program in which you learn skills to manage your disease and adopt healthy new lifestyle behaviours. This series of workbooks is part of that program, based on real-life experiences.

Medical experts and patients with COPD – people just like you – worked together to update this program that you can customize for yourself. National<sup>1</sup> and international<sup>2,3</sup> guidelines agree that patient education and self-management are valuable for people with COPD.

We also tested this educational program as part of a clinical trial. 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 hospitalizations and fewer emergency room visits. Their overall health also improved, enabling them to do more of the activities they enjoyed, and better cope with their disease.<sup>4,5</sup>

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.

Dr. Jean Bourbeau



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## Welcome to “Managing Stress and Anxiety” of the learning series Living Well with COPD

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, you must take care not to let yourself be pulled down by negative emotions.

Living Well with COPD means knowing 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.<sup>6</sup>

### In this module you will learn to:

- ✓ Identify the ‘stressors’ in your life and understand your reactions to them.
- ✓ Break the Anxiety-Breathlessness Cycle.
- ✓ Be more assertive about stating your needs.
- ✓ Relax your mind and body through relaxation techniques: deep breathing and visualization (positive thinking and negative thought stopping).
- ✓ Apply rules to live a healthier life.

## Identifying stressors in your life

Living Well with COPD means knowing 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 force them to make changes in their life.

### 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 close 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 will 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.

**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. He may begin to feel anxious whenever he thinks about going out 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 that you may be facing.

## Understanding your anxiety response

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

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

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

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What do you do when you are anxious?

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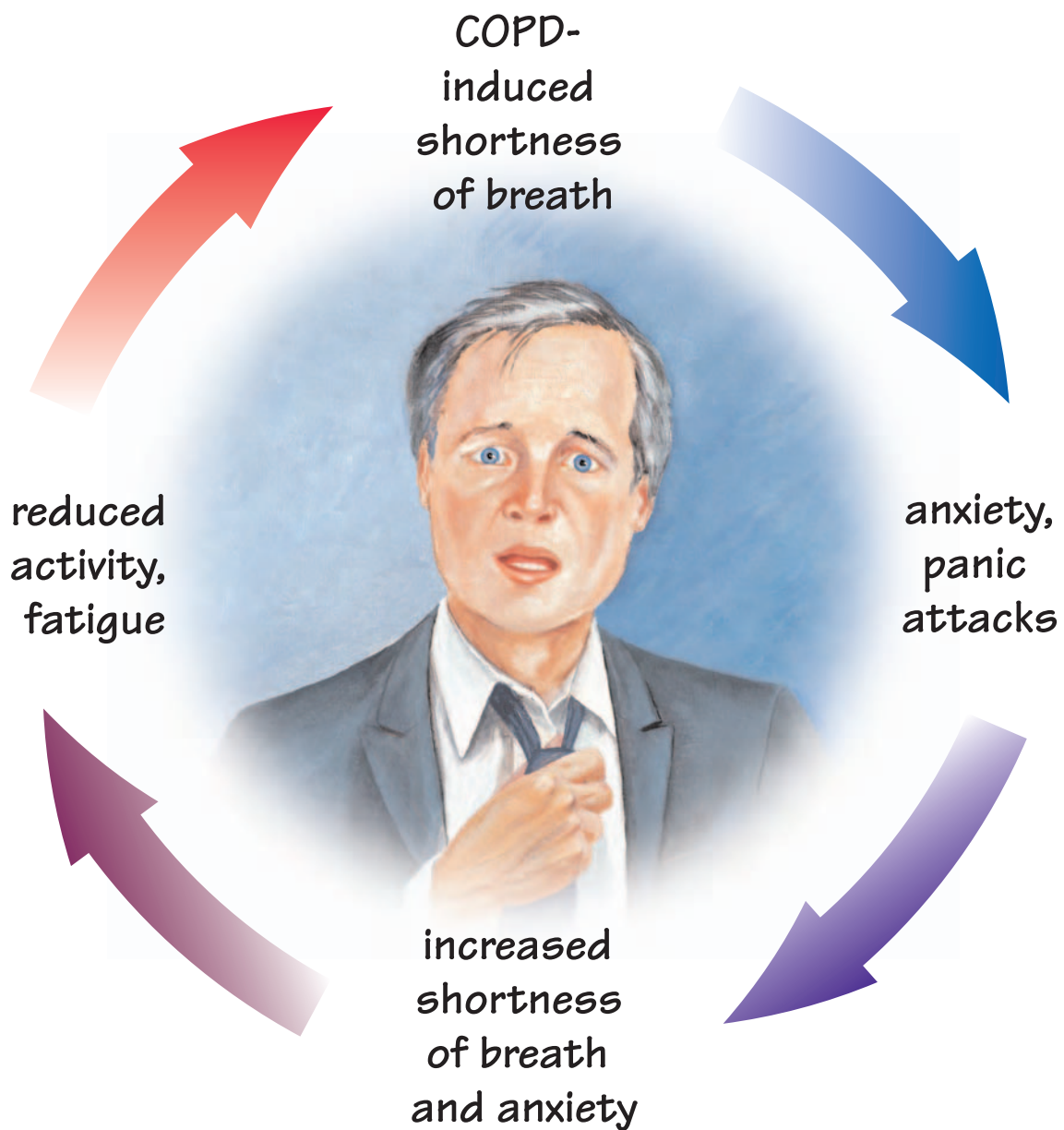
Can you think of other actions that would help you to better cope with this situation in the future?

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

## The Anxiety-Breathlessness Cycle



### 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 less you are in shape. You will experience more fatigue, shortness of breath and anxiety.
- This is the **Anxiety-Breathlessness Cycle**

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



## How to break the Anxiety-Breathlessness Cycle

- **Recognize your fears.** Understanding what makes you anxious is the first step to controlling your reaction. Do not be too hard on yourself. Do not think yourself weak for being afraid.
- **Examine and investigate your fears.** Some of the beliefs that you grew up with may be causing your fears. Ask yourself: Are they based on things that have happened or on things that 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.
- **Instead of worrying, plan your actions in advance.** You will be less anxious, knowing that 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 will only make you anxious.
- **Let yourself make mistakes.** For most problems, there are a number of 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 will 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.

- **Use humour.** Having COPD is certainly not fun. But being able to laugh at yourself can help reduce your stress and create a positive atmosphere.
- **Learn to relax.** You can use the relaxation techniques that you will be learning in this module.
- **If you feel uneasy, ask questions and find answers.** Do not hesitate to talk to the people close to you about your feelings and your condition.
- **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.



**Do not try to deal with everything by yourself. Your friends, family and health professionals can help you learn to live with COPD**

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

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Who helps you the most?

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

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**Remember:**

- Talk about your problems.
- Do not let them accumulate.
- Do not hesitate to ask for help.
- Express yourself!



## Assertive Communication

*“Keeping quiet or neutral is something we find in speeches, but not in people’s hearts”.* (From Pierre Billon, *L’ogre de Barbarie*)

### 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 up to it. Your friend does not believe you and says that you do not look sick. You feel angry with your friend, who has no idea what it is like to be in your situation.

### How would you react?

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## Now let us look at some typical scenarios:

Aggressive Reaction	Results
<p>You say, "Why don't you just go and leave me alone!"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• When you lose your temper, your friend feels attacked, perhaps unloved, misunderstood and probably angry. The result is a strain on the relationship.</li><li>• You become anxious.</li><li>• You feel short of breath.</li></ul>

Passive Reaction	Results
<p>You do not say anything and agree to go out, even though you know it is too much for you.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 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 his or her wish.</li><li>• You become overtired.</li><li>• You lose your self-respect and your self-confidence.</li></ul>

Assertive Reaction	Results
<p>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."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 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.</li><li>• Your friend now understands how you feel and might suggest another activity that both of you can do later.</li><li>• You have expressed your feelings and respected your friend's desire to go dancing.</li><li>• You are proud of yourself.</li><li>• You take this opportunity to do something else.</li><li>• You save your energy.</li></ul>

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



**In this module you have learned 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:**

- Despite being able to manage stress, fear and anxiety better, there will be days when you feel that you have had enough. Take it in stride. This is a normal feeling that you will overcome.

**Learning to relax will also give you more physical and mental energy.**

## Relaxation Techniques

What do you do to relax?

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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



## Now let's relax

### **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”.

1. Put one hand on your abdomen.
2. Breathe in deeply.
3. 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.
4. Exhale through your mouth while keeping your lips pursed (as if you were about to whistle).
5. Feel your abdomen returning to its normal position.
6. Wait after each exhalation until you are ready to take another deep breath.
7. 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.

### **Remember:**

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

## Mental Images (Visualization)

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 is easy for them to forget that they still have many wonderful things in their lives.**

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

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

**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, it is difficult to dispute the power of an image.

### **Remember:**

- Your attitude is important.
- Optimists tend to seek solutions to problems, whereas pessimists tend to dwell on their worries and fears.

## Visualization Techniques

Now create your own positive image using a visualization technique: 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 would make you happier.

Describe your image.

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### Positive Thinking

1. Concentrate on a positive image.
2. Begin to relax.
3. 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.
4. End this visualization exercise by retaining your image.
5. Do these exercises once a day.

As you have learned, visualization is a form of relaxation. It can help you maintain a positive attitude. However, if you find your mind constantly straying to negative thoughts and images, the following visualization technique can help:

### **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)



**This exercise is designed to calm and refresh your mind and your body. It combines the two relaxation techniques that we have just seen**

### **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 or CD with this exercise.
- Now close your eyes. Take a deep and relaxing breath. Imagine a warm sensation filling your body. Continue to breathe deeply and regularly. 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 breathing deeply and regularly. Let your mind wander and imagine yourself walking in a beautiful meadow ...
- Take a deep breath. Smell the crisp grass and wild flowers. Look at the flowers across the grass.
- Feel the tall grass on your legs. Breathe in deeply. 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.
- Breathe in deeply. 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”.

### **Deep Breathing (Diaphragmatic Breathing) and Positive Thinking**

- 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.



## Rules for Living a Healthier Life

Keep up your commitment to building a positive attitude. Try to apply the following 11 rules, inspired by the writings of Jean-Yves Roy.

### 11 Rules for Living a Healthier Life:

Today I will...

1. Smile at least twice.
2. Hum a tune for at least fifteen minutes.
3. Eat healthy foods.
4. Learn a new word.
5. Express my opinion.
6. Listen to myself and make myself happy.
7. Solve at least one problem at a time.
8. Focus on something I consider beautiful; for example, a person, place or thing.
9. Compliment someone.
10. See how I can try to improve my life.
11. Do my exercises.

– Jean-Yves Roy

### Remember:

You cannot control what happens to you, but you can control how you choose to react to it.

Try to maintain a positive and flexible approach to life. Identify the situations that can cause you stress, deal directly with any emotions that may arise and move forward.





*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?*

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***With practice and patience, you will succeed.***

- *You are now ready to do your daily activities.*
- *You feel rested, refreshed and confident.*
- *You now know how to relax and keep a positive attitude.*
- *You can now better manage your COPD.*

Notes:

Notes:

# Acknowledgements

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*Living Well with COPD has also been updated in consultation with groups of healthcare professionals and COPD patients from different regions of Quebec.*

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RÉSEAU QUÉBÉCOIS  
DE L'ASTHME  
ET DE LA M.P.O.C.

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