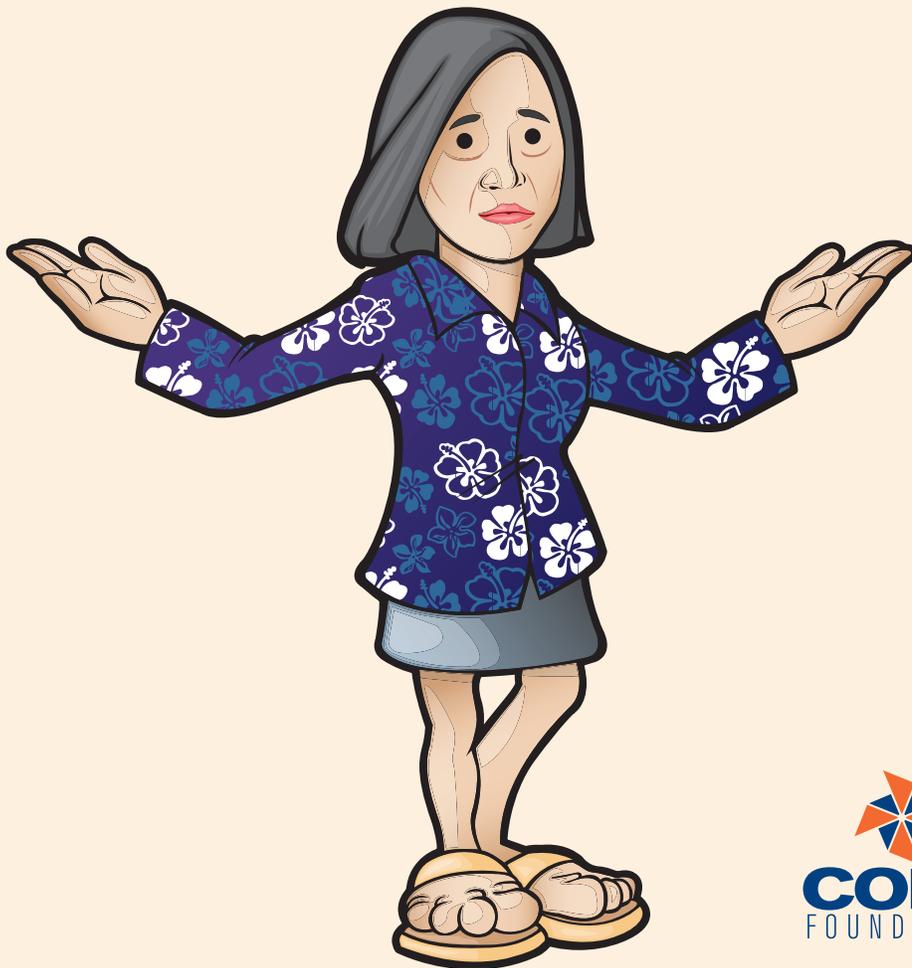
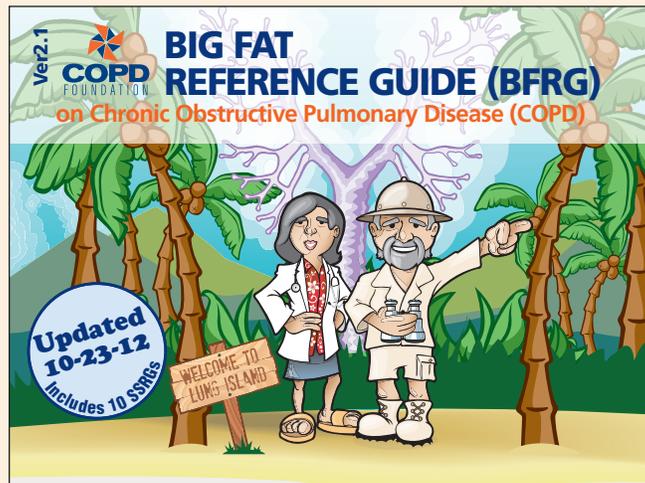


Coping with you Chronic Disease
COPD Foundation's
Slim Skinny Reference Guide® (SSRG)

Coping With Your Chronic Disease





**This “Slim Skinny Reference Guide:
Coping with your Chronic Disease”
is part of the COPD Foundation’s
Slim Skinny Reference Guide®
series which has been taken from the
COPD Big Fat Reference Guide®.**

**To access the complete *COPD Big Fat
Reference Guide*®, visit www.copdbfrg.org.**

The mission of the COPD Foundation is to develop and support programs which improve the quality of life through research, education, early diagnosis, and enhanced therapy for persons whose lives are impacted by Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD).

Coping With Your Chronic Disease

We all have things we have to cope with in our lives. We all face stressful times. But now you have a new problem to face: living with a chronic lung disease—chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD*). You were probably stunned when you first learned you had this disease. If you had never heard of COPD, it may have sounded scary. You may have felt overwhelmed. Or perhaps you felt relief to finally know what was causing your breathing problems. Or perhaps it took awhile for the idea that you have a chronic disease to sink in.

Learning about a chronic illness causes many different emotional responses. In this *Slim Skinny Reference Guide*® we provide you with information about these common reactions. We also give you suggestions on how to deal with this new stress. Ideas for coping with many emotional problems are provided.



***COPD** is an umbrella term used to describe the progressive lung diseases including: emphysema (em-fa-see-ma), chronic bronchitis (kron-ick-brawn-kie-tis), refractory (re-frac-ta-ree) asthma (az-ma) and some forms of bronchiectasis (brawn-key-eck-tay-sis). If you have COPD you have trouble moving air in and out of your lungs because of damage to the airways and/or the air sacs.

Recognizing and Dealing with Stress

We feel stress when what we need to do feels bigger than our ability to do these things. We all handle stress using our own talents and ideas.

But too much stress can be overwhelming. It can make us feel frustrated and tired. We may feel helpless. When we feel like this, adding one more problem in our lives can make us feel as though we are unable to handle even our simplest life chores.

Remember: *this Guide is not a substitute for professional counseling. If needed, your doctor can give you names of mental health professionals with whom you can talk. (See the "Getting Help From Professionals and Peers" section of this booklet.)*

Stress Affects Your Body and Health

Our bodies are constantly making changes to meet the demands of each new situation. This is true for times of stress. During a dangerous situation, our bodies have acute stress reactions. Hormones are released. Our heart rate and blood pressure are increased. Our blood flow is increased to help the legs, brain and lungs deal with the new problem.

Chronic stress reactions occur when our bodies are in a tensed response state for a long period. If we do not manage our stress well, our bodies can be affected. The brain, heart, muscles and lungs can become overloaded. Many medical problems have been linked to chronic stress.

But through simple methods we can learn to manage our stress. These methods can help us calm our immediate reactions to stress. We can relieve long-term tension. And we can maintain a healthy balance in our lives.



Some Methods for Helping with Stress Are:

- **Listening to music:** This is most helpful if you are able to do this without being distracted. Try lowering the lights. Sounds of nature (ocean, birds, waterfalls) can also be soothing.
- **Exercise and stretching:** Exercise is a great stress reliever. Stretching exercises, such as yoga, can provide great relief. Lying down and tightening and releasing your muscles can be very soothing. Start with your face muscles. Move all the way down your body from your head to your toes.
- **Talking About Your Feelings:** Sharing your feelings with someone who cares can be a real comfort. It helps to feel you are understood.
- **Personal or Group Therapy:** There are professionals who focus on reducing stress. Therapists can help you with managing stress. Or you might prefer help from a workshop or support group. Your doctor or local hospital should be able to help you find all of these.
- **Relaxing with Meditation:** This is a way of relaxing the mind. You sit in a comfortable position and let your thoughts float away.
- **Relaxing with Biofeedback:** This is a way of getting information on how your body is working. Monitors are used to track your heart rate and muscle tension. A therapist guides you through relaxation exercises. The monitor shows you which exercises relax your body the most. This teaches you how to relax your body on your own.
- **Education:** There is much information in books and on the internet about reducing stress.



Stress Causes Emotional Responses

Stress doesn't just affect us physically. It also causes us to have emotional responses. How you responded to finding out you have COPD may be similar to the feelings people have when they experience a major loss. Your emotions may be like the emotions felt at the loss of a job, the loss of a marriage or even a death in the family.

There is a known set of emotions related to a loss. It is known as the "grieving process." There are five stages. As you deal with the idea that you have COPD, you may have many of these grieving emotions. The Grieving Emotions Are:

Denial: Learning you have a chronic disease, COPD, is shocking. You might find yourself saying, "That doctor doesn't know what he's talking about." Or you might say, "So I have COPD, no big deal." Perhaps you have stopped joining in social events. You may be avoiding your family and friends. It is ok to want time alone. But let your friends and family know you need this time. You don't want to push them away completely.

For family and friends — helping someone in denial:

*Don't take anything personally.
Be a good listener. If you feel the denial has gone on too long, avoid telling them what you think they should do or feel.
Tell them what you are feeling.
Don't blame them for your feelings.*

For family and friends — helping someone in the anger stage:

Remember the anger is not directed at you. It is directed at the situation. Understand that this anger is part of a process. It is a sign of change. Give yourself a break from the person if you need it. But tell them you are not deserting them.

Anger: It is normal to be angry about upsetting, life-changing information. You may think it is unfair that you have this disease. You may think, "Why me?" You may be angry at yourself for smoking. You may be angry at your doctors. You may be angry with them because there is no cure. You may be angry with your family. You may think they don't understand what you are going through. It is O.K. to be angry. Ignoring your anger can make it come out in other

ways. You may nag others. Or constantly point out their flaws. Try to find a way to vent your anger without hurting anyone else. Talk with a trusted friend. Confide in your pastor. Or write about your feelings in a journal.

Bargaining because of guilt and regret: During this stage people want to make up for past mistakes. You may feel guilty about having COPD. You may feel guilt or regret about not taking better care of yourself. You may feel guilty about smoking. You may regret spending too much time at work and not enough with family. You may feel like time is running out. We “bargain” when we make a promise based on the hope of getting a result we want.

This phase can be positive. It can help you review what is important to you. It can help you make changes.



For family and friends – helping someone in the bargaining stage:

Acknowledge their feelings. Remember that bargaining may be related to quiet guilt. Remember the past cannot be undone. Support their efforts to resolve unfinished business.

Depression Can Create More Depression: *Depression causes us to be tired. We don't want to do much of anything. We may neglect caring for ourselves and our homes. This neglect can also be depressing. To get out of this cycle of depression try:*

- *Eating a well balanced diet. Avoid junk food.*
- *Exercising: It can improve your mood.*
- *Seeking out friends: Limit the time you spend alone.*
- *Sharing your feelings: Talk with friends, family or your doctor.*

If none of the above efforts help your depression, you may need to seek help from a mental health professional.

Sadness and Depression: Everyone feels sad or depressed from time to time. Feeling depressed can also make you feel weak and tired. At this stage you may begin to think about how this disease will affect your life. You may be worried about finances. You may be concerned about your independence. Or you may be worried about your role in your family. After thinking about these issues, you can begin to prepare yourself. You can begin to cope.

For family and friends — helping someone in the depression stage:

Help them have a realistic view of how their disease may affect their life. Share with them how you view it. Your realistic view may actually be much better than the one they have in their head. Let them know you are willing to listen.

Other non-grieving, but common emotional responses to stress:

Confusion: The stress of finding out you have a chronic disease can make you feel like you need to do something right away. But the disease is new to you. So, you may feel uncertain about what you can or should do. This urge to do something before you have enough information can lead to confusion. Be patient. This is not the time to make big changes. Allow some time to pass. You don't have to take leaps and bounds. You can take tiny, steady steps.

For family and friends — helping someone in the confused phase:

Avoid trying to "fix things." Assure them that you will be there to support them. Tell them that together you will work through this difficult time.

Anxiety and Panic: Anxiety is a feeling that something bad is going to happen. It is being fearful about something unknown. It is a nervous feeling. When the anxiety becomes intense it becomes panic. During an "attack" your heart may feel like it is racing and pounding. Many people experience an occasional panic attack. If you suffer repeated panic attacks, you should find a mental health professional who treats panic disorders.



During an attack you can follow a 3-step plan to help it stop:

- 1) Get in a position that will help your breathing muscles work better. Sit. Lean forward with your arms on your lap or a table.
- 2) Breathe in through your nose. Pucker your lips like for a kiss. Breathe out through these pursed lips. Breathe out for longer and longer periods.
- 3) Relax all of your muscles not involved in breathing. Drop your shoulders. Let your arms go limp. Close your eyes and relax.

Fear: After finding out you have a chronic disease, you may become obsessed with fears of your death. This may happen even though you have years of life left. You may feel you've been given a death sentence. Death is not something that is talked about a lot. But if you have questions, you may want to talk with someone about your fears. You may want to ask your doctor about what will happen as your disease gets worse. You may want to know what decisions your family will have to make. Asking these questions is hard. Getting the answers may also be hard. But when you have addressed these fears, you can move to the next phase: acceptance.

Acceptance of your disease does not mean you have given up. It means you understand you cannot control everything in your life. It shows you are ready to move on. This can be a time of reflection and renewal. Reaching acceptance does not mean you will never feel the other emotions again. You may feel anger, depression and other emotions again. This does not mean you will have a set-back. But you may have new periods of sorting out your feelings again. This can lead to a better understanding of yourself and others.

A Panic Attack Can Cause:

- A very fast heartbeat
- Difficulty breathing
- A sense of terror
- Dizziness, nausea
- Chest pains
- Hot flashes or sudden chills
- Tingling in the fingers or toes

Skills for Coping with Stress

We all have coping skills that we have used throughout our lives. What skill or plan we use to cope usually depends on the situation. What works for coping in one situation, may not work in another. There is not really one coping style that is better than all others. The more coping styles you are aware of, the better able you can handle stress and problems.

Coping Styles:

- **Confrontive coping:** An aggressive effort to change a situation. It involves some risk-taking.
- **Distancing:** An effort to detach yourself. Involves making light of the situation.
- **Self-controlling:** An effort to control one's feelings and actions.
- **Seeking social support:** An effort to get support from others. Support may be anything from emotional help to financial assistance.
- **Accepting responsibility:** Involves admitting your role in the problem. Also includes an effort to make things right.
- **Escape-avoidance:** An effort to avoid or escape the problem.
- **Planful problem-solving:** Involves a logical effort to change the situation.
- **Positive reappraisal:** A focus on personal growth.

Coping styles that worked for us at one time in our lives may not work for us as we get older. Consider the above list of coping styles. Think of times when you have used the different styles. Which were more helpful? Do you tend to use one or two styles more than others? Are there some coping styles that you never use? You should find that the *active* coping styles solve problems better than the *passive* ones.

Using Communication to Cope:

Getting others to understand what we mean is not always easy. Communication can be complicated. Good communication involves more than just choosing the right words. Our gestures, tone of voice, the look on our faces and even silences are all part of our message. These things tell far more than the words we speak. We have all had frustrating conversations. At those times, it seemed no matter how hard we tried we could not get the other person to understand us. Why are some conversations hard and some easy? The following tips may help.

Tips for Improved Communication

- **Choose assertive communication:** This type of communication is neither passive nor aggressive. It involves communicating your personal rights and feelings. But it does not include abusing the rights of others. Passive communication is weak and self-sacrificing. Aggressive communication is self-centered, hostile and demanding.
- **Use exact language. Avoid the general:** General statements such as, "You always do that," sound like an attack. Avoid the words "always" and "never."
- **Know when the time is right for certain discussions:** Avoid talking when you or the person listening does not have enough time to complete the talk fully. If the talk must be ended early, agree to pick it back up later, where you left off. If possible, avoid a "hot topic" too close to bedtime. Also avoid a "hot topic" when you know the other person is occupied with other matters.
- **Be a good listener:** Active listening means giving feedback to the other person. This will let them know if they have been understood.

This is very important when talking about difficult topics.

- **Don't place blame. Avoid using "should":** It is easy to look around for someone to blame when things go wrong. Or we may have regrets and may blame ourselves. Finding the blame for problems focuses our thoughts on the past. If you hear yourself using the word "should" you may be blaming someone.
- **Don't try to mind-read or expect it from others:** Remember, just because something seems obvious to you, doesn't mean that it is obvious to anyone else.
- **Develop trust by taking some risks:** Friendships are based on trust. We build trust by choosing to share information about ourselves with others. This may mean sharing something that may make them think less of us. To build trust we sometimes have to take risks about what we share.
- **Let it all out:** Sometimes the best thing to do is "let it all out." It can sometimes be a huge relief to let out all our pent-up emotional frustrations in one big outburst. One safe place to do this is with a professional therapist. They are trained to listen to emotional outbursts.



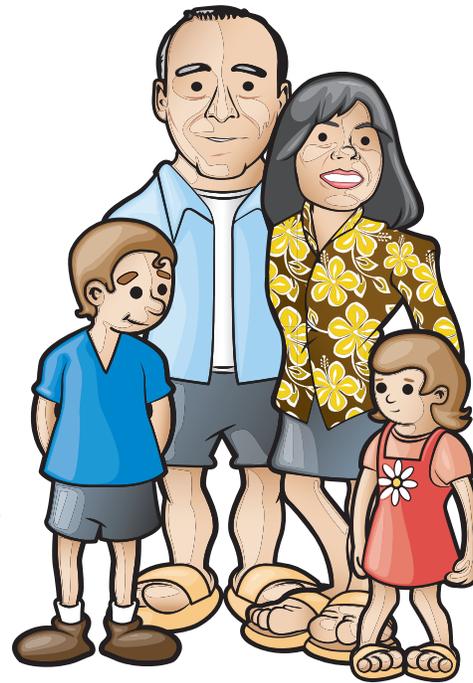
Getting Help from Professionals and Peers

If you decide to seek help with coping with your emotions or dealing with the stress of living with a chronic disease, there are many resources available to you.

Mental health professionals: To choose a mental health professional, get a list from your insurance company. Ask your doctor for help. Friends and family may also be able to help. They may have had good experiences with one

counselor. In addition, your employer may have an Employee Assistance Program. This program can help you find a professional. You may need to meet with several counselors before you find someone with whom you feel comfortable.

Support Groups: The COPD Foundation or your local branch of the American Lung Association can tell you if there is a COPD support group in your area. Many people with COPD find that these groups have the special understanding they need.



Visit www.copdfoundation.org or www.lungusa.org for a list of support groups in your state. Your local hospital may also have lists of support groups in your area. Choose a group that feels right to you and meets your needs. Groups led by health professionals are usually educational. Groups led by their members are usually emotionally supportive. An ideal group should have no more than 15 people.

Faith: For many people, having faith in a higher power gives them the strength to meet life's challenges. To explore faith in your life you may want to talk with a minister, priest, rabbi or spiritual guide. Or you may want to join a support group at your church.

Reflecting on What is Important to You

All of us have stress in our lives. Learning how to cope with this stress can decrease how it negatively affects our physical and emotional health. Having a diagnosis of COPD may give you the opportunity to stop and reflect. What is most important to you? What makes your life meaningful? What do you want to make sure continues in your life? What things are okay to give up? What things will you fight to hold on to?

Determine what is important to you in your life. Recognize and understand the common emotional responses that having a chronic disease can cause. Develop good communication skills to express yourself. Appreciate the thoughts and feelings of others. Know how to reach out for help from others.

These steps will help you plan for a rewarding life for you and your family.

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**This Slim Skinny Reference Guide® (SSRG)
was created by the COPD Foundation.**

Take Action Today. Breathe Better Tomorrow.



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