Six Ways to Manage COPD and Stress

by ERIC PATTERSON

Coping With COPD and Stress

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) puts frustrating limitations on your life. It changes your relationships and your abilities. Readjusting your routines and structure around COPD takes time, and the more time you spend fighting COPD, the more stress trickles into your life.

Over time, stress will dramatically impact your physical, mental and social health in unwanted ways. The stress triggered by COPD, in turn, triggers the worsening of COPD symptoms. The COPD and stress cycle must end, but the only advice you hear is to avoid stressful situations — what if your entire life is stressful?

How to Cope With COPD and Stress

Stress-busters are active coping skills you can use to lessen your stress while improving your overall well-being.

Sometimes the best stress-busters do not target the stressor directly. Rather, they add positives to make the negatives less significant. Here's how:

Know Yourself

Your stress is different from your spouse's, your friend's, and even others with COPD. Know your triggers as well as your responses to these triggers.

How stressful is a doctor's appointment? How much frustration do you feel after learning of a new limitation? Understanding your stressors means that you know the right amount of positivity needed to regain equilibrium.

When balanced, you can be happy. List your stressors and their effect on you.

Add Environmental Positives

What is your favorite smell, sound, sight, taste or touch? Adding these to your day reduces stress by triggering positive associations in your brain.

Watching a favorite funny movie or hearing a motivating song has the power to influence your mood and energy levels. Using these tools empower you to limit the perception of stressors.

Add Physical Positives

Get plenty of sleep. Eat balanced meals centered on proteins and vegetables. Exercise daily.

These simple necessities are too often overlooked. Rather than feel helpless to change your habits, take control.

Understand the restrictions COPD puts on you and push yourself to the limit.

Sleep, diet, and exercise work closely together and provide many desirable chemicals to your body when in harmony. If one of the trios is lacking, experiment with the others to gain balance. Success is possible — you just haven't found it yet.

Add Psychological Positives

Your mind benefits from calm, positive thoughts. Countless relaxation scripts, videos, and audio tracks are available online to aid in this process. Like with sleep, diet, and exercise, there exists a relaxation technique that works for you.

Practice patiently to find success. Positive thoughts come from optimism and praise. If other people are unable or unwilling to give it to you, find ways to provide it yourself.

The process will seem painful initially, but with time, they will become more comfortable and rewarding.

Add Social Positives

Family, friends, professionals and online relationships offer support and comfort daily. Do you allow them to soothe you?

Many people with high stress paradoxically push away positives. Be willing to accept verbal and physical affirmations from people in your life.

COPD contributes to a range of physical complications, but you largely control the psychological impact. Do all you can to understand your stressors and pull the positives in your life closer to you.

Do you feel like you don't have any positives in your life? Accept that stress is distorting your views. Positives are out there. Go find them!

Just Breathe

Experiencing stress can be a very suffocating feeling and may actually cause you your COPD symptoms to exacerbate. It's okay to take a step back and breathe. Practicing some simple breathing exercises like deep breathing or pursed breathing may help calm your racing mind while providing extra oxygen to your lungs.

Deep Breathing Exercise

1. While standing or sitting, tuck the elbows back just slightly.
2. Take a deep breath in.
3. Count to five seconds while holding the breath in.
4. Exhale slowly, until you feel that you have released all of the trapped air.
5. Repeat the process two or three times.

Pursed-Lip Breathing Exercise

1. Breathe in through your nostrils to the count of two.
2. Squeeze your lips to make a small opening at the center of your mouth
3. Breathe out through your pursed lips to the count of three or five seconds.
4. Repeat the entire process two or three times.

After focusing on just your breathing, you may begin to feel more cool and collected. The best part of breathing exercises is that they can be done whenever and wherever and are a good stress coping mechanism.

The Takeaway

The next time you begin to feel stressed or overwhelmed, keep these COPD and stress management tips in mind to help prevent a COPD exacerbation.