

Coping With COPD

Navigating Life With a Chronic Condition



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This Guide to Better Living was supported by AstraZeneca.

COPING WITH COPD

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a term used to describe chronic lung diseases including emphysema and chronic bronchitis. This disease is characterized by breathlessness.

Living with COPD can be challenging at times, especially when you are first diagnosed. Remember that despite the ups and downs that might come with your COPD, you can still live a happy, healthy, and active lifestyle. In this guide, we will talk more about how to cope with your COPD.

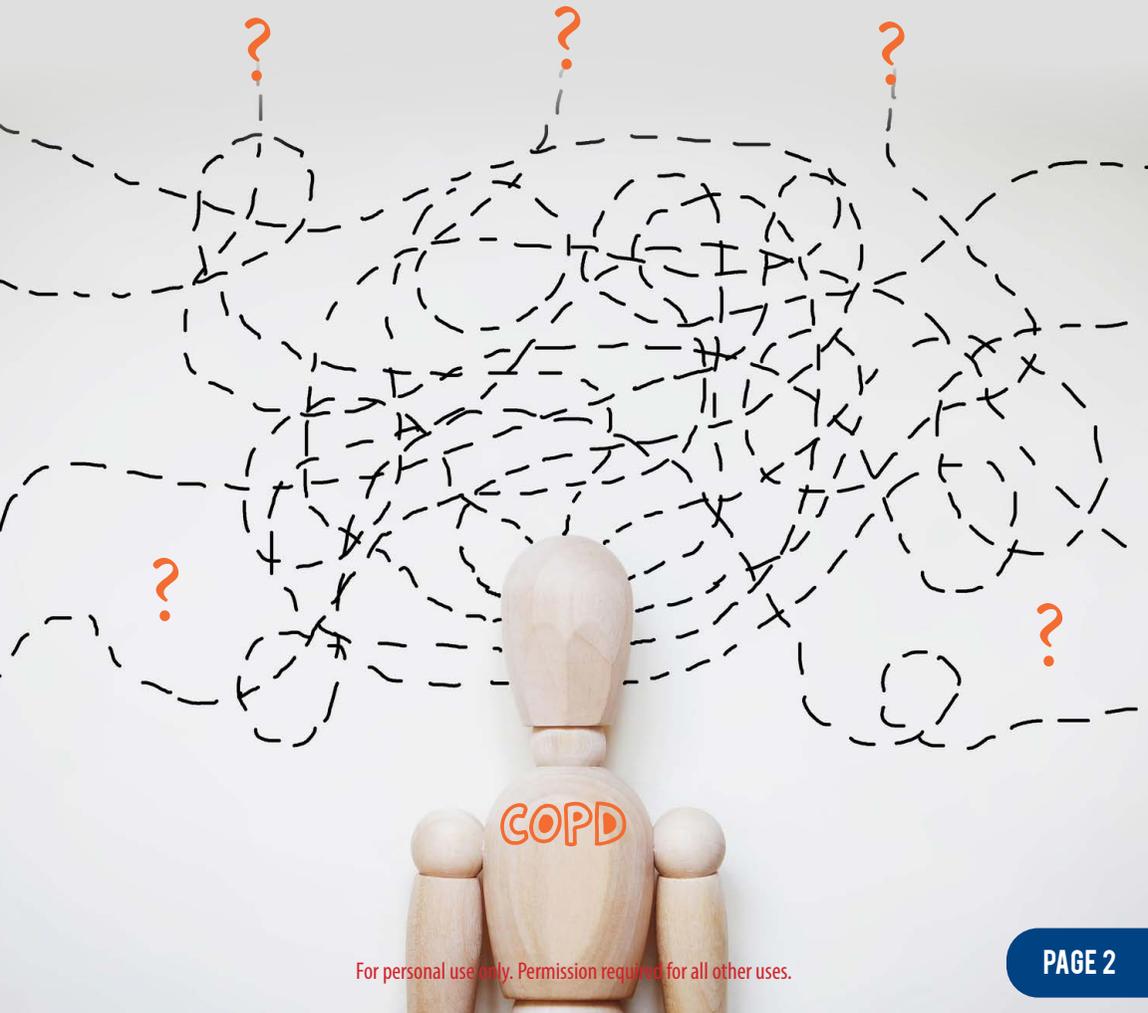
This guide is not a substitute for professional counseling. If needed, your health care provider can refer you to a mental health expert.

COPD AND STRESS

Living with a chronic (not curable, but treatable) condition like COPD can cause people to feel nervous, stressed, and overwhelmed. These feelings are normal! People with COPD and other chronic conditions will often have good days and bad days with their mood and symptoms. Let's talk about some ways to manage these feelings in healthy ways.

Stress Affects Your Body and Health

Too much stress can be hard on your body. When you feel stress, your body releases hormones to help manage it. Stress hormones cause your heart and lungs to work harder. This reaction is helpful when you are responding to a challenge, but it can affect your health if it continues for a long time. If your stress is not managed, it can cause other medical problems.



HOW TO RELIEVE STRESS

Relieving stress is very important for your health and especially for managing your COPD. People manage stress in different ways. Stress can be managed on your own by:



There are professionals that specialize in reducing and managing the stress from a chronic illness like COPD. Your health care provider may refer you to a counselor or other professional. You may participate in one-on-one counseling and treatment or join group therapy where you can connect with people just like you.

IT IS NORMAL TO FEEL MANY EMOTIONS WITH COPD

You may have feelings of:

Loss:

COPD may cause a feeling of loss. This may be the loss of your ability to breathe easily, be as physically active as you were in the past, or to do things without having to plan ahead.

Denial:

Learning that you have COPD can be a surprise. You may not believe the news at first.

Isolation:

Some people with COPD avoid social gatherings due to feelings of anxiety and worrying about others judging them and their condition. Others may not want to be alone, but may feel disconnected from their friends and family.

Anger:

You may feel angry and frustrated that you are dealing with this chronic condition.

Guilt and Regret:

You may feel guilty about having COPD if you were a smoker. You may regret not taking better care of yourself in the past.

FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS:

A COPD diagnosis can be overwhelming. Be a supportive listener. Let your loved one share their feelings without any judgment.

Listen to your loved one's feelings. Remember, the past cannot be undone. Support their efforts to make positive changes.

Remember, their anger is not directed at you. It is directed at the situation. Understand that this anger is part of a process and is a sign of change.



FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS:

Talk with your loved one about how COPD may affect their life. Let them know you are willing to listen and help.

Sadness and Depression:

Everyone feels sad from time to time. To help improve your mood, try:

- Eating a well-balanced diet
- Exercising or trying one of your favorite activities
- Meeting with friends and family
- Sharing your feelings with a trusted person
- Seeing a mental health professional

If your sadness becomes overwhelming, or begins to affect your daily life and activities, consider talking with your health care professional or seeing a mental health counselor for support and treatment. Sometimes sadness is a sign of depression, which needs to be treated by a professional. Ask your primary care physician for a referral for talk therapy and other mental health treatment options.

Confusion:

There is a lot to learn when you find out you have COPD. You may feel unsure about what you can or should do. Don't worry; you can think things through before making any big decisions or changes. Your health care provider can help guide you.

Anxiety and Panic:

Anxiety and panic are common with COPD. Being anxious means feeling worried about something that might happen in the future. When anxiety becomes intense, it can turn into panic.

If you have panic attacks, talk with your health care provider. There are mental health treatments, including counseling, that have been shown to help prevent and manage panic attacks. They may also suggest some calming exercises to help you. You can try exercises like pursed lip breathing.

A PANIC ATTACK FEELS LIKE:

A VERY FAST OR
POUNDING
HEARTBEAT



DIFFICULTY
BREATHING
& CHEST PAIN



DIZZINESS &
NAUSEA



HOTFLASHES
OR SUDDEN CHILLS



TINGLING
IN THE FINGERS
AND TOES



PURSED LIP BREATHING

Sit and lean forward with your arms resting on a table. This helps to relax your breathing muscles.

Breathe in through your nose (as if you are smelling something) for about two seconds.

Pucker your lips like you are blowing out candles on a birthday cake.

Breathe out very slowly for 4 to 6 seconds.

Relax all your muscles, close your eyes, and relax.

Repeat the steps if needed.

FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS:

Avoid trying to “fix things.”
Assure your loved one that you will be there to support them.
Tell them that you will work through this difficult time together.

BREATHE IN 1...2...

BREATHE OUT 1...2...3...4...5...6...



ACCEPTING YOUR COPD

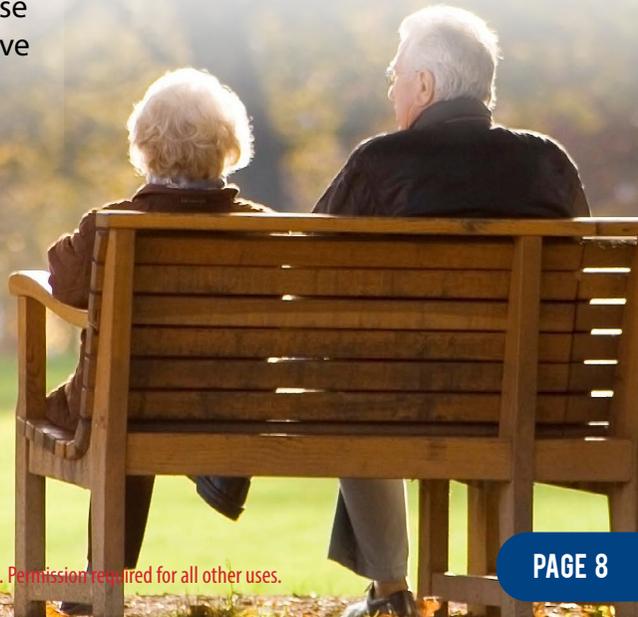
Accepting your COPD diagnosis doesn't mean you have given up. It shows that you are ready to continue living your life! This is the first step in enjoying a healthy and fulfilling life with COPD.

While you can't always control your COPD symptoms, you can find ways to live with them. Focus on the things you can control and let go of the things you cannot. As time goes by, you may feel anger, depression, and other emotions again. This is not a setback but a natural part of the journey with any chronic condition.

Coping Skills

We all have coping skills we have used throughout our lives to help us work through our feelings. The plan we use to cope usually depends on the situation. Choose the coping tool that works best for you. You can try:

- **Goal Setting:** This can include thinking about what is important to you, such as your favorite activities. Then, you can make a plan with your health care provider for how to continue enjoying those activities. Try setting small, short-term goals. By choosing a reasonable, reachable goal, you can feel a sense of accomplishment that might have been missing.
- **Seeking Support:** This can include talking with your friends and family, joining support groups, getting financial help, finding resources for getting your home medical equipment and medications, or seeing a mental health professional.



PROGRAMS AND TECHNIQUES

Pulmonary rehabilitation has also been shown to help people with COPD. This program includes exercise, education, and emotional support. The health care professionals at pulmonary rehabilitation are experts in working with people who are short of breath. To start a program, you need a referral from your health care provider.

Talk therapy with a mental health professional can also be very helpful for coping with chronic diseases like COPD. There are many different types of talk therapies, such as acceptance and commitment therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, and mindfulness. Mental health professionals can also help you with stress reduction, relaxation techniques, and improving the quality of your sleep.

With the help of a professional, you can work to manage your feelings, emotions, and other challenges through useful coping strategies. Your mental health professional will work with you to find the treatment that is best for you.

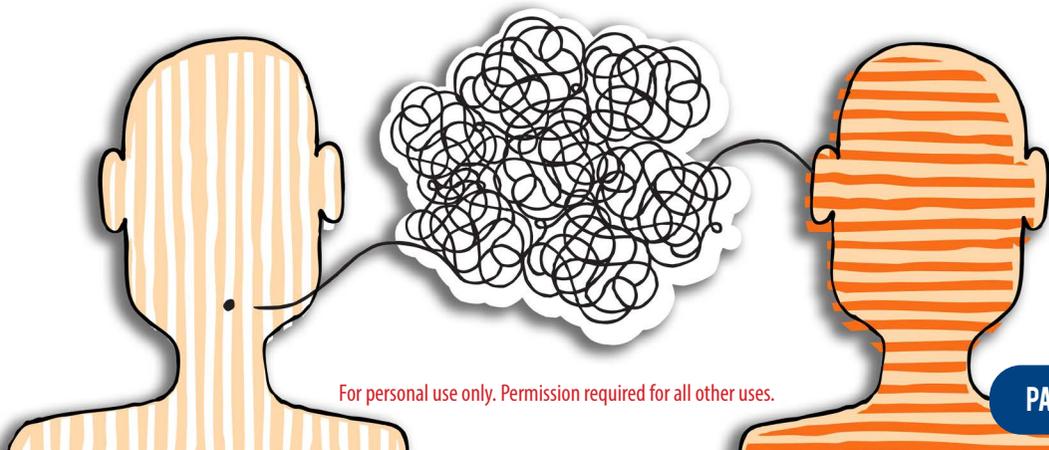
Many people find it helpful to connect with others who have COPD. You can find online support on the COPD Foundation's online community of more than 55,000 individuals, COPD360social, at www.copd360social.org



USING COMMUNICATION TO COPE

You may find that other people in your life may not understand what you are going through with your COPD. Good communication can help you to explain your feelings and needs. Here are some tips for improving communication:

- **Use assertive communication:** Be direct in talking about your personal rights and feelings. Talk about both positive and challenging topics in a respectful and open way and ask that others do the same with you.
- **Use exact language:** Be specific when discussing your feelings. Avoid using generalizations such as words like “always” or “never.”
- **Know when the time is right for certain discussions:** Make sure you have enough time to talk about important topics. Wait until you have everyone’s undivided attention. You may have to delay your chat or finish it later.
- **Be a good listener:** Active listening means letting others know they’re heard. For example, maintaining eye contact, not interrupting, and repeating back what the person said are helpful in making sure you truly understand what someone is saying. This type of listening is very important when talking about difficult topics.
- **Don’t join in the “shame and blame game”:** Some people with COPD feel guilt or shame about their condition. Blaming yourself or others is not helpful. Rather than focusing on the past and what might have caused your COPD or what you could have done differently, shift your focus to the future. This change can help you live your life based on what matters most to you now. What are your hopes for your condition? What are some goals you’d like to work toward? You are more than your disease.

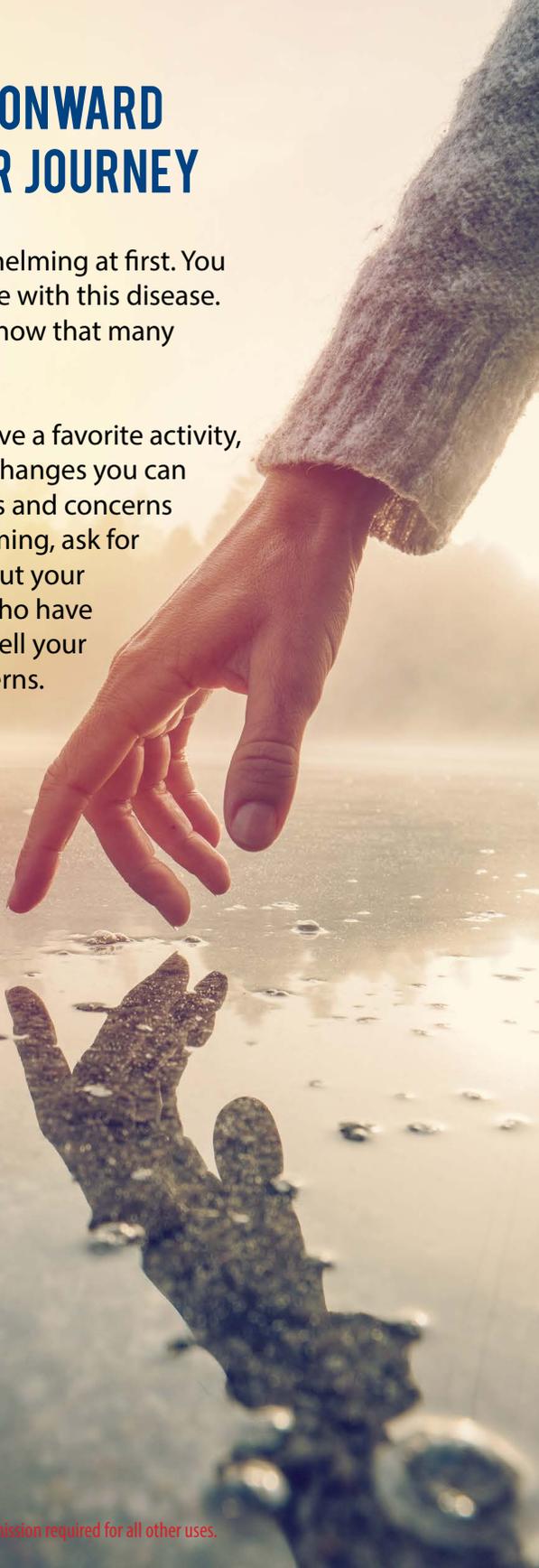


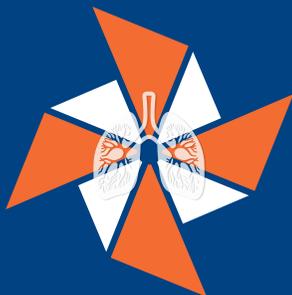
USING COPING TO MOVE ONWARD IN YOUR JOURNEY

A diagnosis of COPD may feel overwhelming at first. You may wonder how your life will change with this disease. You are not alone in these feelings. Know that many things can help you cope.

Set small, meaningful goals; if you have a favorite activity, ask your health care provider about changes you can make to keep doing it. If your feelings and concerns about your COPD become overwhelming, ask for help. Talk with family and friends about your condition and connect with others who have COPD. Use relaxation exercises. And tell your health care provider about any concerns.

Coping with your lung condition will help you to improve your outlook and maintain your overall health and happiness, so you can live your fullest life with COPD.





COPD FOUNDATION®

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www.copdfoundation.org

COPD360 Community Support Line:
1-866-316-COPD (2673)

Bronchiectasis and NTM Information Line:
1-833-411-LUNG (5864)

This guide has been reviewed by members of the
COPD Foundation Guides for Better Living Review Team