

COPING WITH COPD

[Home](#) > [Health Hub](#) > [Health Library](#) > [Coping with COPD](#)

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[Returning to work](#)

[Take care of your emotional health](#)

[Talk with your doctor](#)

[Foster a caring sexual relationship with your partner](#)

[Seek support from your family](#)

[Reduce stress](#)



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Coping With COPD

By making lifestyle and activity changes, you can take an active role in treating your COPD and help improve your health. You can resume your regular activities as you feel better, but follow your doctor's activity guidelines. Increase your activities slowly when your symptoms improve, and always listen to your body so you know when it's time to take a rest break.

Returning to work

If you have been in the hospital for your COPD, your doctor will tell you how soon you can return to work after you go home. Your return to work will be based on your overall health and symptoms, as well as your rate of recovery.

You should try to work as long as you are able. If you have a job that requires a lot of physical work, you will need to change some of your job-related activities. This might involve job re-training or taking disability. Talk to your doctor about the type of job you have. Your doctor can help you decide if your job will affect your lung condition and if you need to make changes.

Take care of your emotional health

Your diagnosis of COPD, your symptoms, changes in your energy, and your concern for the future might cause you and your loved ones to feel angry, depressed, worried, or overwhelmed. Your concerns are normal. As you begin taking charge of your health and making positive changes, you might find these feelings start to fade. However, if negative feelings continue and interfere with your ability to enjoy life, talk to your doctor. Professional counseling might help you feel better.

If you think about suicide or feel worthless or helpless, contact your health care provider or an emergency mental health group right away.

Tips to help you deal with emotional blues:

- Get dressed every day
- Go out and walk whenever possible
- Keep up with activities or hobbies you enjoy
- Stay involved with others. Try not to withdraw yourself from your friends and family. Involve them in your health care appointments
- Share your feelings with your spouse, a friend, or clergy
- Get a good night's sleep
- Follow your treatment plan
- Set and follow a realistic daily schedule
- Join a support group for people with your condition

Talk with your doctor

Your doctor will help you manage your health. To make the most of your office visits:

- Make a list of what you want to talk about and write down your doctor's responses to your questions.
- Keep a diary to record changes in your condition and in how you feel. Bring this with you to your doctor visits.
- Ask about other health services that might benefit you, such as physical therapy, occupational therapy, counseling, or a dietary consultation.
- Occasionally, COPD can have a genetic (inherited) component. You might talk to your doctor about whether testing for a genetic cause of COPD, called alpha-1 antitrypsin deficiency, is appropriate for you.

Foster a caring sexual relationship with your partner

COPD can affect all aspects of your life, including having the energy, desire, or ability to participate in sexual activity. Keep in mind, a sexual relationship is both physical and emotional. The following suggestions may encourage intimacy:

- Talk openly with your partner.
- Find different ways to show affection.
- Have sex when you are rested and physically comfortable.
- Have realistic performance expectations. You might need to modify your sexual practices to decrease the energy required.
- Be caring, loving, and honest.
- Your medications might affect arousal and sexual performance. Talk to your healthcare provider about your concerns.
- Taking an inhaled bronchodilator before sexual activity is a good practice. The bronchodilator relaxes the air passages and improves breathing. Taking oxygen before or during sexual activity might also be helpful.

The amount of energy it requires to engage in sexual activity with your partner is similar to climbing about one or two flights of stairs or walking about one half mile at a brisk pace. If you cannot perform these activities without becoming tired or short of breath, talk to your doctor before participating in sexual activity.

Seek support from your family

The support of family and friends is very important. Social support is the single most important buffer against stress. Here are some tips you can offer to your family or friends when they ask you how they can help. Family and friends can:

- Help you remain as active and independent as possible
- Provide emotional support
- Help with household chores and with grocery shopping and other errands as necessary
- Learn what they can about your condition and prescribed treatment by attending doctors' appointments with you
- Provide encouragement and help you follow your prescribed treatment plan

Reduce stress

Stress and anxiety can make you feel short of breath and cause your COPD symptoms to become worse. Shortness of breath can lead to even more anxiety, faster breathing, and fear. You cannot avoid stress; it is part of daily life. However, developing effective ways to manage stress and learning to relax can help you prevent shortness of breath and avoid panic.

Here are some ways to manage stress:

Learn To Change Thought Patterns That Produce Stress

What you think, how you think, what you expect, and what you tell yourself often determines how you feel and how well you manage rising stress levels.

Reduce Stressors (Causes Of Stress)

Identify the major stressors in your life: money problems, relationship problems, grief, too many deadlines, busy schedule, lack of support. If you can't resolve these stressors alone, get professional help. Try to avoid situations that trigger stress for you. Practice effective time-management skills, such as delegating when appropriate, setting priorities, pacing yourself, and taking time out for yourself.

Practice Relaxation Exercises

Relaxation exercises are simple to perform and combine deep breathing, releasing of muscle tension, and clearing of negative thoughts. If you practice these exercises regularly, you can use them when needed to lessen the negative effects of stress. Different types of relaxation exercises include diaphragmatic and pursed lip breathing, imagery, repetitive phrases (repeating a phrase that triggers a physical relaxation, such as "Relax and let go"), and progressive muscle relaxation. Many commercial audiotapes and books are available that teach these exercises.

Exercise

It's an excellent way to burn off the accumulated effects of stress.

Get Enough Sleep

If you are not sleeping well, you will have less energy and fewer resources for coping with stress. Developing good sleep habits is very important.

Here are some tips:

- Do not go to bed until you are tired
- Develop specific bedtime rituals and stick to them
- If you have trouble sleeping do not watch TV, read, or eat in bed
- Do not engage in exercise or strenuous activity immediately before bedtime
- Avoid caffeine
- Do not nap
- Go to bed and get up at the same time every day, including on the weekends

Follow The Recommended Nutritional Guidelines

Junk food and refined sugars are low in nutritional value and high in calories. They leave you feeling out of energy and sluggish. Limiting sugar, caffeine, and alcohol can promote health and reduce stress.

Delegate Responsibility

Stress overload often results from having too many responsibilities. You can free up time and decrease stress by delegating responsibilities. Take a team approach and involve everyone in sharing the load. Try applying these guidelines at home or modifying them to fit your situation at work:

- Make a list of the types of tasks involved in the job
- Take time to train someone to do the job or specific tasks
- Rotate unpleasant duties
- Give clear, specific instructions with deadlines
- Be appreciative. Let people know you are pleased by a job well done. Allow others to do a job their own way
- Give up being a perfectionist

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