

A Breath of Fresh Air

A newsletter for Reliant Medical Group COPD patients and their families

Vol. XI, No. 2

Edited by Margalit Lai, RN, MS, COPD Program Care Manager

Spring 2014



I am sure we can all agree that spring could not have come soon enough but here it finally is! After such a harsh and long winter, spring feels especially wonderful. The warm days with a gentle breeze are just perfect for going outside and taking a really deep breath, soaking it all in.

On communicating...

I have to share with you today a growing frustration with my failed attempts to get you to call Chris or myself when you start having problems. Many of you suffer needlessly before deciding to call and while waiting let your lungs deteriorate even further. I have tried many ways to get you to call us, but many of you still hesitate for some reason. Please remember to never say, "I did not want to bother you... I thought I would get better...I had an appointment with you already scheduled." **Please call us whenever you need us!**

In this issue our nurse practitioner Meg Paige addresses a very important topic that a lot of you can relate to. Stress seems to be a growing problem in modern life but for people who have difficulty breathing it is, of course, particularly important since it makes your breathing even worse.



What is STRESS?

By Meg Paige, NP

Stress is a condition that can be characterized by emotional tension or physical symptoms. Every person reacts differently to a potentially stressful situation and may feel threatened or anxious. Stress can be positive or negative. There can be strong emotions, sadness or depression as a part of this normal reaction to the stress.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, these are typical reactions to stressful events:

- Disbelief, shock and numbness
- Feeling sad, helpless and frustrated
- Anxiety or fear about the future
- A feeling of guilt
- Anger, tension, and irritability
- Difficulty concentrating and making decisions
- Crying
- Loss of appetite
- Headaches, back pains and stomach problems
- Difficulty breathing or increased heart rate
- Smoking or use of alcohol or drugs
- Nightmares
- Loss of appetite
- Sleeping too much or too little



It may seem that there's nothing you can do to help with your stress. Yet, you have control over your life to help manage the stress. This stress that you may feel can be managed by taking charge – of your thoughts, emotions, schedule and the way you deal with your problems.

How to deal with stress

First identify the source of your stress. It's not always obvious. Start by looking closely at your habits, attitude, and excuses. Until you accept responsibility for the role you play in creating or maintaining it, your stress level will remain outside your control. You could start a stress journal to help identify the stressors in your life and the way you deal with them. What you would do is write down every time you are stressed. In this journal, you log the following:

- What caused your stress?
- How you felt, both physically and emotionally in response to the stress
- How you reacted in response to the stress
- What you did to make yourself feel better

Here's a list of unhealthy ways many people deal with stress:

- Smoking
- Drinking too much
- Overeating or under eating
- Withdrawing from friends, family, and activities
- Using pills or drugs to relax
- Sleeping too much
- Procrastinating
- Taking out your stress on others



Healthy ways to manage stress:

- Avoid the stressor
- Alter the stressor
- Adapt to the stressor
- Accept the stressor

Start management strategies – six ways to manage your stress:

#1 Avoid unnecessary stress:

- Learn to say “no” – know your limits and stick to them. Taking on more than you can handle is a recipe for stress.
- Avoid people who stress you out, limit the amount of time you spend with this person or end the relationship entirely.
- Take control of your environment – if the evening news makes you anxious, turn the TV off.
- Avoid hot-button topics – if you get upset over religion or politics, cross them off your conversation list.



#2 Alter the situation:

- Express your feelings instead of bottling them up
- Be willing to compromise
- Be more assertive, deal with problems head on
- Manage your time better

#3 Adapt to the stressor:

- Reframe problems – try to view stressful situations from a positive perspective
- Look at the big picture
- Adjust your standards
- Focus on the positive

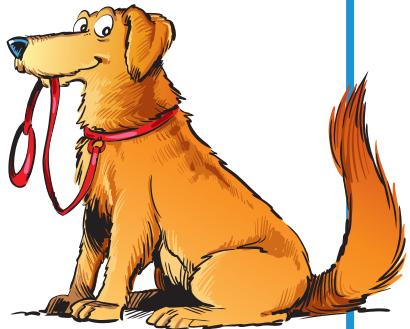
#4 Accept things you can not change:

- Don’t control the uncontrollable
- Share your feelings
- Learn to forgive

#5 Make time for fun and relaxation:

You can reduce your stress in your life by nurturing yourself. Here are some healthy ways to relax and recharge:

- Go for a walk
- Play with a pet
- Call a good friend
- Write in your journal
- Take a long bath
- Spend time with nature
- Work in your garden
- Get a massage
- Listen to music
- Watch a comedy



Don’t forget to take care of your needs. Nurturing yourself is a necessity!

#6 Adopt a healthy lifestyle:

- Exercise regularly
- Eat a healthy diet
- Reduce caffeine and sugar
- Avoid alcohol, cigarettes and drugs
- Get enough sleep

Besides recognizing what makes you stressed, recognize if you need more help. Talk to a psychologist, social worker or a professional counselor.



**Be happy,
don’t worry...**

Patients' Contribution



Millie Bongovio is one of the members who participate in our two-hour monthly group meetings in which we discuss COPD, healthy eating and exercise, or healthy living for short. For our last meeting Millie brought along some healthy and delicious snacks. We got to enjoy munching on sweet grapes, toasted pita bread with humus, apple cinnamon rice cakes with ricotta cheese and Laughing Cow cheese on Special K wheat crackers. If any of you would like to join us, all you have to do is call me. If not, I hope you will try some of these fun snacks on your own. Bon Appétit!



"I intend to live forever...so far, so good."

— Steven Wright

Here's how to reach us

By phone:

Margalit Lai: (508) 368-3936

Chris Andersson: (508) 368-3935

Our email address:

margalit.lai@reliantmedicalgroup.org

christine.andersson@reliantmedicalgroup.org



Our "old fashioned" address:

WMC Suite 390, 123 Summer Street, Worcester, MA 01608

Online you can check us out at:
www.reliantmedicalgroup.org/copd