



EBOP Asthma/COPD Support Group **Newsletter August 2011**

Winter seems to be on its peak and I hope you keep reasonable warm. The temperature of our homes affects our health. Room temperatures under 16 degrees Celsius are considered harmful for health and the World Health Organisation recommends a minimum of 18 degrees.

On the brighter side – the days are getting longer with a lovely spell of sunny weather and spring seems just around the corner.

August Support Group Meetings

This month we have invited speakers to talk about **stress and depression**. COPD can be affected by these conditions and visa versa: COPD can trigger stress and depression. Even if you think you are not affected, think twice, because everyone has stress sometimes in their life and it will be interesting to learn about this and what help is locally available.

Kawerau: Monday, 15th August at 10.00am, Senior Citizen Hall, Porritt Drive

Opotiki: Tuesday, 16th August at 10.00am, 17 Kelly Street

Whakatane: Wednesday, 17th August at 1.00pm, Disabilities Resource Centre Trust, 141 King Street, Kopeopeo

Transport

Some of our members have difficulties to find transport to our COPD support group meeting. If you are able to offer a ride to and/or from the meetings, please contact me.

On the funny side – consider this complaint:

Gentlemen,

I have been riding your trains daily for the last two years, and the service on your line seems to be getting worse every day. I am tired of standing in the aisle all the time on a 14-mile trip. I think the transportation system is worse than that enjoyed by people 2,000 years ago.

Yours truly,

Patrick Finnegan

Dear Mr. Finnegan,

We received your letter with reference to the shortcomings of our service and believe you are somewhat confused in your history. The only mode of transportation 2,000 years ago was by foot.

Sincerely,

Irish Railway Company

Gentlemen,

I am in receipt of your letter, and I think you are the ones who are confused in your history. If you will refer to the Bible and the Book of Numbers 22: 1-35, you will find that Balaam rode to town on his ass. That.... gentlemen, is something I have not been able to do on your train in the last two years!

Yours truly,

Patrick Finnegan.

Looking forward to seeing you at the meeting.

Gisela Sonntag

COPD Field Officer

(Phone 07 307 1447 or 0800 227 363)

Learning how to deal with stress

Having COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease) is often stressful. It is not easy to accept that your breathing limits your daily life. People with COPD differ in what stresses them.

It is possible to work out what triggers stress for you and note how it affects your body, thoughts and behaviour. It may be your environment (e.g. crowds or a smoky room), your physical state (e.g. discomfort from breathlessness or tiredness), or your psychological state (e.g. unrealistic beliefs about yourself, or feeling frightened).

This is the start to changing unhelpful ways of dealing with stress.

Sometimes our response to stress is physical

Our body has only one way of responding to physical and mental stresses. Chemical changes occur as we prepare to confront or avoid the stress ("fight or flight"). These might include:

- heart beats faster
- breathing rate increases
- muscles become tense/sore
- urge to to to the toilet
- sweating/shaking
- not able to sit still

Sometimes our response is in emotions and thoughts

Thoughts: racing thoughts, difficulty concentrating or making decisions, anticipating or magnifying problems which may not exist, thinking more about ourselves and forgetting others' needs.

Emotions: feeling irritable/angry, feeling anxious or panicky, feeling overwhelmed, helpless or hopeless.

Behaviours: sleep disturbance, decreased ability to say no to "quick but unhelpful fixes" such as alcohol, cigarettes, coffee, more aggression towards people and objects, an inability to complete goals.

What can you do about stress? 2 important methods of coping

Two important coping mechanisms relate to actions and acceptance.

1. Actions - acting to make a positive change or resolve a concern

Label three columns with the headings: *Action Now*, *Action This Week*, *Can't Do Anything*. Divide the things you worry about into the three columns, and then write next to each concern, the action that you can take to help resolve it.

e.g. Action Now: Pick up the phone to clarify a worry about medication.

e.g. Action This Week: Going to a concert - plan transport in advance and obtain seating plan to sort out easy access and seating.

e.g. Can't Do Anything: Try to work out if there are any advantages in worrying about these events. If not, try to worry only about things you can action.

Here are some other actions you can take to help reduce stress in your life:

- Change your pace or do something different
- Try to keep as active as possible. Ask your doctor, physiotherapist or nurse about exercise and COPD
- Share the load with a friend or counsellor
- When you are feeling overwhelmed by tasks, write a list and halve it. Most people are far too ambitious about the amount of things they can do in ONE DAY
- If you feel angry with someone else, distract yourself by going to another room or listening to music. Remember the "fight or flight" reaction only lasts a short time provided you can stop the thoughts which activate it
- Try to pursue interests. You may need to swap jobs in the house which demand too much energy (e.g. cooking instead of gardening).

2. Acceptance - learning to accept the limits of your condition

- Let go of unrealistic beliefs, such as 'the world should be fair and just'
- Learn to accept responsibility for your own feelings. Even when things seem unfair with your health the meaning you attach to this can determine whether you become bitter and resentful or retain control over your feelings and actions
- Make sure your goals are FLEXIBLE. You may need to adopt new goals if the old ones cannot be attained. Always have a plan B and emotionally prepare yourself for this option

- Talk yourself into being patient. Setbacks and delays happen to many people with COPD - you are no different
- For everyone there are times when you do not get what you wanted or deserve. Unpleasant experiences are only permanent setbacks if you allow them to be.
- Remember we are not robots or saints, so why do we expect to always perform faultlessly?

Learn to turn off the stress response in your body

Relaxation can prevent or lessen the degree of tension you experience when feeling stressed. Start before the tension becomes intense, by scanning your body (do a mental check of each part especially shoulders, neck, face, back and hands) when you feel stressed. Stress may also change your breathing patterns causing shallow breathing from the chest.

Try this.... In this order

- Move and stretch all parts of your body
- Realign body into correct posture. Check that your shoulders are down
- Try the breathing techniques you were taught by your health professional
- Shut your eyes if you can and try to visualise a pleasant scene. Water scenes are often very relaxing particularly if they are repetitive such as waves on the beach. Try putting some music in your visualisation and note details in your scene. Your mind will learn to associate that music with relaxation. You can then play it or sing it to yourself to relax when you are away from home.
- Stay put for a while, then open your eyes when you are ready. Rescan your body.

Acknowledgement for assistance with this Factsheet to Claire Dawson,
Senior Clinical Psychologist, Canterbury Respiratory Services

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