Pulmonary Rehabilitation Educational Booklet
Stress Management
Hospital Authority
Coordinating Committee in Occupational Therapy, Hospital Authority
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Forward

This stress management educational booklet is compiled by Hong Kong occupational therapists. It provides you with information about the impacts of stress on health, and practical strategies on stress management with various techniques.
Importance of stress management

Patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases (COPD) have been facing and coping with their chronic debilitating condition for years. The coexistence of difficulty in breathing and progressive decrease in functioning is the cause of stress to them. Continuous exposure to stress increases the risks of worsening dyspnoea, insomnia, high blood pressure and gastrointestinal discomforts. Therefore, effective stress management and relaxation can help to ease these symptoms of stress and breathlessness in patients with COPD.

Sources of stress

Various aspects in our daily living, may create stress, such as from:

1) work
2) the surrounding environment (physical & social)
3) the personality of the individual
4) financial burden and
5) responsibilities from home management

Psycho-physiological responses when you are under stress

Physiological impacts:
- increase of heart rate
- increase of sweating
- gastrointestinal discomforts

Psychological impacts:
- anxiety
- depression
- Insomnia
- decrease of appetite
Stress reduction strategy

1) Identify your source of stress
   - Facing your problems directly is the most effective way of finding the solutions

2) Find someone to share your problems
   - Find someone who genuinely cares about you whom you can comfortably express your worries; or see a professional for advice

3) Plan ahead
   - Plan your daily schedule appropriately to maintain balance between activity and rest

4) Make leisure pursuit a habit
   - Your life is not just work or household chores. Having fun enhances well-being in your life.

5) Allow time for a good rest
   - If you are under a high level of stress, you need a good rest. The rest at least allows you to escape away from them temporarily. Going for a short walk, listening to music or a nap may help.

6) Relaxation practice
   - Practice of relaxation techniques helps you to adjust to the tension. They aim to ease your muscle tension and mental stress.

Preparation before relaxation practice

1) Make yourself comfortable e.g. lying on the bed or couch, and avoid wearing tight clothing
2) You also need a quiet environment with soft lighting and comfortable room temperature.

Relaxation practice can come in several ways. Some of them are listed as below, and you can consult an occupational therapist or other related professionals for relaxation advice.
(1) **Autogenic relaxation through controlled breathing**

Try to focus on controlled and relaxed breathing, and use your body awareness to reduce stress

1) Inhale through your nose slowly, and try to imagine that there’s a warm breeze going up from your toes

2) Then exhale from your mouth slowly, and remind yourself to relax. Imagine that your stress and anxiety come out together with the exhalation.
(2) Progressive muscular relaxation

In this technique, you focus on the interplay of tension and relaxation of each muscle group. This helps you to experience be aware of the difference between muscle tension and relaxation.

Foot and leg
- Point your toes downwards to the floor then relax.
- Tighten your calf muscle by pulling your toes towards yourself and relax.
- Curl your toes downwards and relax.

Abdomen
- Tuck your stomach in and relax.

Back
- Expand your chest with your shoulders pulling backward and relax.

Hand
- Clench your fist and relax.

Arm
- Tighten your biceps by drawing your forearm up towards your shoulder and relax.

Shoulders
- Raise your shoulders up to your ears and relax

Neck
- Head up and go backward until you feel the tension of your neck and relax.
- Head down with your chin touching your chest and relax.

Eyes
- Raise your eyebrows as far as you can and relax
- Close your eyelids tightly and relax

Mouth
- Seal your lips tight and relax
- Open your mouth wide enough to stretch your jaws and relax

When you practice progressive muscle relaxation, don’t forget to exhale slowly when you relax your muscles. It makes relaxation more effective.
(3) Visualization Technique

Many people may have the experience of daydreaming. Visual imagery relaxation is like a form of structured daydreaming, which leads us to relax our mind.

In this technique, you take a visual journey to a peaceful, calming place or situation. Try to use as many senses as you can, including smells, sights, sound and touches. Your “dream” may be the warmth of the sun, the feel of the grains of sand or the smell of salt water, or situations that soothe you. When our brain receives comforting visual imagery messages, it will bring us a state of relaxation including slowing of heart rate, breathing rate and reduction of muscle tension.

Conclusion

With patience and regular practice, you will be able to manage the relaxation techniques and enjoy the benefits.

Acknowledgement:

Special thanks to Ms Katherine Tam, HHH SOT (IRS) and Mr. Hercy Li, RHTSK DM (OT) for their contribution on editing. We would also like to thank the colleagues from the Occupational Therapy departments listed in the table for their support in the publication of this booklet.

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