

Factsheet 21

Updated on 4 November 2020

Supporting the mental health of people with respiratory conditions

This factsheet has been designed for use by healthcare professionals only.

Introduction

As we discuss the pandemic, people with respiratory conditions such as asthma may start to get anxious and stressed, and these behaviours can trigger an asthma attack or increased exacerbations. As outlined by the Mental Health Foundation, the following tips can be provided¹:

- Encourage people to avoid rumours and use reputable sources such as government websites. It is particularly important to remind people to avoid any rumours that focus on strategies to avoid getting Covid-19. Covid-19 can affect anyone irrespective of age, gender, sex or ethnicity.
- Encourage people to try and stay connected with family and friends via phone or virtually.
- Try to avoid making assumptions about who is responsible for the outbreak, and forming predictions on the future.
- Try to find a balance with following media coverage.

Signpost people with respiratory conditions to the [Mental Health Foundation](#) to find out more information².



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The British Lung Foundation also provides hints and tips that can be used to help people alleviate their anxiety. These include³:

- Using breathing techniques: there are different breathing techniques used for different lung conditions. It is important for people to speak to their physiotherapist (where appropriate) to get the most appropriate advice.
- Staying calm and relaxed. It is important for people to stay calm and relaxed while completing these breathing exercises. This will help people to breathe, keep the airways open whilst ensuring minimal energy is used.
- Encouraging people to relax their shoulders and neck muscles as these muscles will use more oxygen when tense and may contribute to any breathlessness.
- Encouraging people to talk to someone about their anxiety can also help. Support groups are available locally.
- Keeping active and exercise. It is important to encourage people to keep active which enables them to take their mind off anxious thoughts. In the winter season, exercising can be difficult. However, it is important to encourage people to exercise as being less active can make breathlessness worse in the future. Exercise helps to reduce stress and tension and helps with overall health.

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Alternatively, you can also signpost people to [Breathing Freely](#) which supports with breathing techniques for breathing pattern disorder, and manage stress³.

Education for Health

References:

¹ Mental Health Foundation (2020): <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak>

² Breathing freely (Anon): https://www.lifeguidehealth.org/player/play/breathe_land_v1

³ British Lung Foundation: <https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/dealing-with-your-mental-health/anxiety/management>

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