



Breathlessness & Mental Health

What Has Mental Health Got to do with feeling Breathless?

Living with breathlessness can be an emotional rollercoaster. High rates of emotional distress can be found among those affected by a lung conditions and most of the distress can go undetected and untreated.

Around one in four patients will require emotional support from expert services. Common problems can include difficulties with anxiety, depression, problems with personal relationships, difficulties sleeping, and Post Traumatic stress disorder. Psychological distress in those living with a lung condition is associated with a range of harmful outcomes including an increase in physical symptoms, struggling to function day to day, and reduced adherence to treatment. The distress is however treatable, and you are not alone.

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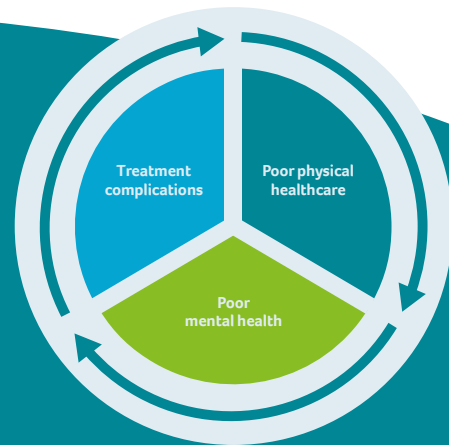
The Emotional Impact of a Lung Condition Diagnosis

Being diagnosed with a long term condition can be shocking and overwhelming. Initial reactions might include disbelief, fear, anger, or sadness.

While these feelings often ease with time, sometimes they persist and become more intense. When life becomes challenging, mental health issues are more likely to surface.

Symptoms to watch out for include:

- Consistently feeling low, down, or sad for at least two weeks.
- Losing interest or pleasure in activities you once enjoyed.
- Isolating yourself from friends and not making plans outside the home.
- Feeling excessively anxious or worried, or struggling to stop worrying.
- Finding it hard to relax or experiencing difficulties sleeping.
- Struggling to follow a treatment plan set by your healthcare team.



Left untreated, mental health problems can significantly impact your physical health. Poor mental wellbeing can reduce your motivation to follow treatment plans, potentially leading to complications.

Fear of a Flare-up

Living in fear of a flare-up, an asthma attack, or not being able to breathe, would understandably lead to feeling distressed, which might include feelings of frustration, guilt, sadness, or worry. These feelings are understandable, and you're not alone. There are many strategies and resources available to help you cope with fear of a flare up.



Medicines for Breathlessness

Your mood can also be affected by side effects from your medicines, such as mood swings. A survey of 3000 people who had taken oral steroids for their asthma showed that 33% reported mental health conditions as a side effect. Talk about the medicines you're taking with your health professional, and whether side effects could be affecting your mood.

Depression

The daily challenges of living with breathlessness can lead to depression, a common and serious issue. People with a lung condition are twice as likely to develop depression as those without. If your feelings of sadness persist and won't go away, you might be experiencing depression.

Common impacts of Breathlessness



Keeping Active

Sometimes people living with a lung condition feel they need to avoid too much activity, to avoid feeling breathless. But not being active can make your breathlessness worse in the long term. Making yourself moderately breathless by being active is good for your lungs. In fact, keeping active strengthens your muscles and can improve your breathing and general health. As well as improving your physical symptoms, keeping active can have a major affect on improving your mental health.



Connecting with others

It's common when struggling with a lung condition to isolate yourself, as it might be difficult to find the energy to socialise, or it may bring up fears of feeling judged by others or anxiety about how to cope when socialising. Talking to people who understand what you're going through can be a big help.



Struggling to Sleep

A lack of sleep can affect how you feel too. Often people with lung conditions find sleeping difficult, often because of symptoms keeping them awake at night. This could also be because of other related conditions like obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA).

How Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) can help

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CBT is a type of talking therapy, that can be very effective in helping people with breathlessness manage their mental health. CBT works by helping you understand the relationship between your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. It teaches practical strategies to challenge negative thinking patterns and cope better with emotional distress.



If you're struggling with your mental health and wellbeing, consider reaching out to NHS Talking Therapies.

Getting support can make a significant difference in managing both the emotional and physical challenges of breathlessness.

For more information on how to support your emotional wellbeing please contact NHS Talking Therapies today:



Contact us today - it is a FREE and confidential service.

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