



SELF HELP

Dealing with stress

Life with Hughes/antiphospholipid syndrome can be as difficult mentally as it can be physically, and coping with the psychological consequences of the condition can be tough.

Due to the unpredictable nature and potentially serious complications of Hughes/antiphospholipid syndrome, you may be left feeling shocked, angry, depressed and frustrated. The first step to dealing with this type of stress is to give yourself time to accept that you have a chronic condition and make the necessary adjustments to your lifestyle; for some people this can be quite painless but, for most, it will take a year or so to come to terms with their diagnosis.

As you are dealing with something that is beyond your control, it is beneficial to develop coping strategies to manage the associated stress. People respond differently so you will need to find the best method for you, but Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) has proven beneficial for many people with long term conditions.

CBT is a form of talking therapy that supports a self-management approach to coping with a medical condition, and uses tried and tested methods to steer away from negative patterns of thinking and change your coping behaviour. CBT has been found to be one of the most effective treatments for conditions where anxiety, frustration and depression are significant problems. If you think you would benefit from CBT, ask your GP or consultant to refer you to someone trained in CBT.

However, if CBT is not for you, there are other strategies you can adopt to manage the triggers of stress or depression including:

- Relaxation techniques such as meditation and breathing exercises.
- Dealing with practical or emotional issues as they develop, rather than letting them fester or weigh you down. If you take steps to take control, no matter how small, this empowerment alone will start to make you feel better.
- Following a healthy lifestyle with a balanced diet and daily exercise. Exercise can be a great stress reliever in itself, as it helps you let off steam and releases endorphins – it's amazing the benefits a simple walk can have. Plenty of rest and sleep is also vital to coping with stress.
- Take time out to relax or do something you enjoy.
- Join a support group (link to Health Unlocked). As Hughes/antiphospholipid syndrome is not always widely known, you may really benefit from connecting with others who are experiencing situations and feelings that are similar to yours, rather than battling to make yourself understood with family or friends. Also, getting to talk about your experience in a welcoming environment can help a lot.

Finally, although it can be difficult to stay optimistic when you have a chronic condition, especially if you are continually experiencing unpleasant symptoms, staying positive can really help your outlook and help you deal with the stress and anxiety.