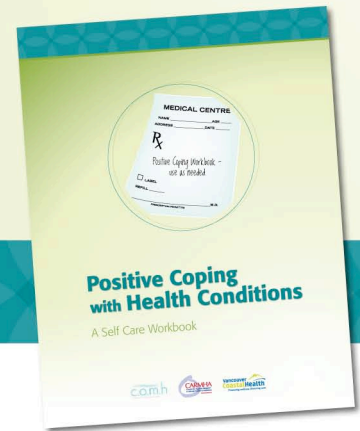


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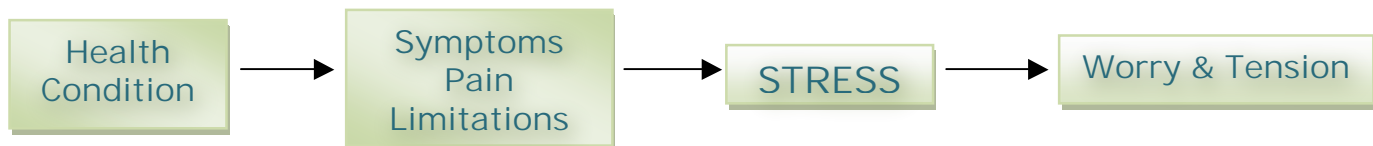


WORRY & TENSION

Positive Coping with Health Conditions (PCHC) is a workbook designed for people dealing with health conditions along with stress problems like low mood, worry & tension, anger or social isolation. This handout is taken from the PCHC workbook -- it teaches skills for dealing with worry and tension. With this handout, you'll get a CD that teaches you how to relax more effectively. You can download the whole workbook for free at www.comh.ca.

Why is this important?

It's not surprising that someone with a health condition might become worried. After all, health conditions cause serious physical problems and may limit your ability to do your job or everyday chores. When you worry about problems caused by your health condition, you're trying to figure out solutions.



But, sometimes the worry and tension go too far. Worrying about health problems can become a new problem! If you experience one or more of the following, then worry and tension might be problems for you:

- You are worrying much of the time – even when you're trying to do enjoyable activities
- You feel nervous much of the time or you sometimes feel panicky
- You have a sense of foreboding, like you're always expecting a disaster
- You feel muscle tension, restlessness, headache or nausea that aren't caused by your health condition or medications (it can be difficult to figure this out – talk with your physician)

Excessive worry & tension cause problems:

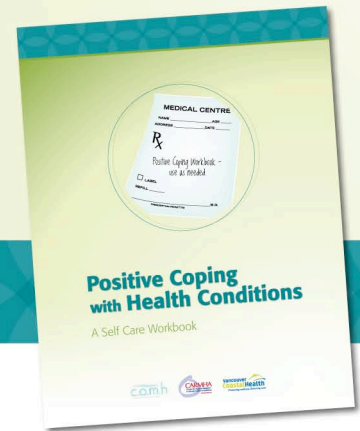
- Worry usually just goes in circles, and doesn't get you closer to finding solutions.
- Worry often happens when you're trying to do something else, like watch a movie with family or friends. It stops you from enjoying the moment.
- If you feel very tense, you won't be very good at thinking clearly about problems. Tension makes it hard to concentrate.
- There can be negative impacts on the health condition– tension can intensify the experience of pain, increase symptoms like breathlessness or fatigue and make you feel so uncomfortable or nervous that you avoid activity.

Note: This brochure is meant to provide accurate information about coping with health conditions. It is not a psychological or medical treatment and is not a replacement for treatment where this is needed.

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How can I reduce worry and tension?

The most useful skills for dealing with worry and tension are:

- Relaxation,
- Managing Worry, and
- Solving Problems.

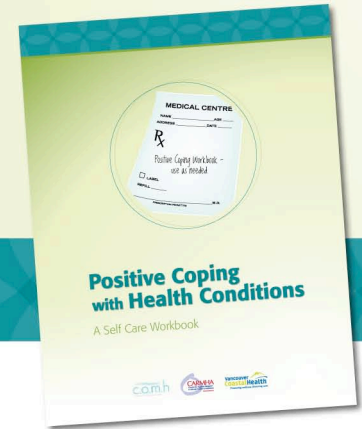
In this handout, we're going to show you how to use each of these skills.

Sometimes worry and tension becomes so severe that a person develops an Anxiety Disorder (for example, Panic Disorder). A physician or psychologist can tell you whether you are suffering from an Anxiety Disorder. The most effective treatment for most Anxiety Disorders is Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, but they may also be treated with anti-anxiety medications. The skills in this handout should still be useful along with other treatments.

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RELAXATION

1. Learn a relaxation method

To get you started on learning relaxation, we've made an audio CD that takes you through a systematic relaxation method. You will have received the Relaxation CD with this handout. If not, go to our Web site (www.carmha.ca/pchc/), where you can download the audio file (free) or buy a copy at low cost. The Relaxation CD shows you how to let go of tension and calm anxious thoughts. Find a quiet spot, maybe seated in a comfortable chair, and make sure that you won't be disturbed for about half an hour. Sit as comfortably as you can, with your feet on the floor and your arms resting at your side. You can listen to the CD through speakers or headphones, whatever feels most comfortable. The relaxation procedure is about 17 minutes long. Now, just sit back and allow yourself to listen. Don't worry about remembering every bit of the procedure the first time; you'll be listening to it again.

2. Practice the method regularly

In order to learn the relaxation method, you're going to need to practice it a number of times. Each time you listen through the relaxation procedure, you'll learn more about how to relax yourself. It's like learning any other skill, whether how to swing a golf club or how to prepare a recipe. Set a modest goal for how often you'll practice the relaxation procedure. Maybe start by setting yourself the goal of listening to the Relaxation CD twice per week for the next several weeks. When you set your goal, make sure to specify when you're going to do it. Your goal should look something like this:

Activity	How often?	When exactly?
Listening to Relaxation CD	Twice per week	Monday and Wednesday evening at 7pm

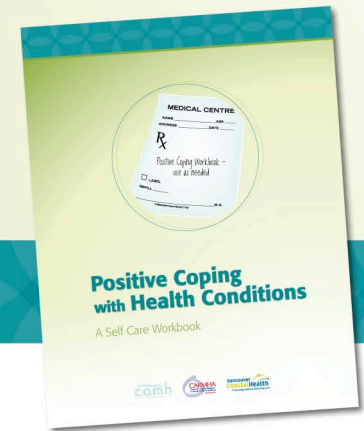
Every time you listen to the Relaxation CD, make a note in your calendar or diary that you have completed your goal successfully.



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3. Choose a “portable” relaxation method

If you’ve practiced with the CD for three to four weeks and it’s been helpful, then it’s time to find a portable relaxation method. After all, you can’t always sit down and listen to a Relaxation CD, and you’re going to be using your relaxation skill throughout the day. You’ll need a brief version of the relaxation that you can do easily in any situation. One portable relaxation method is to use the part of the CD where you focus on your out-breath and, while breathing out, slowly say to yourself ‘Deeply Relaxing’. You then continue with each of your out-breaths, focusing on the words ‘Deeply Relaxing’ as you breathe out – continuing this focus until you feel calmer. This relaxation method is effective for most people and can be done in any situation without drawing attention. It is truly a portable relaxation method. Because this method usually causes breathing to become slower and deeper, we call it the Slow Breathing Method. You might also figure out your own portable relaxation method, using the Relaxation CD or other mental strategies that help you relax. Perhaps there’s a particular image that has always been calming for you, something like a sunny beach or a cool pond. Go with whatever works for you, so long as it helps you relax and can be done easily in different situations.

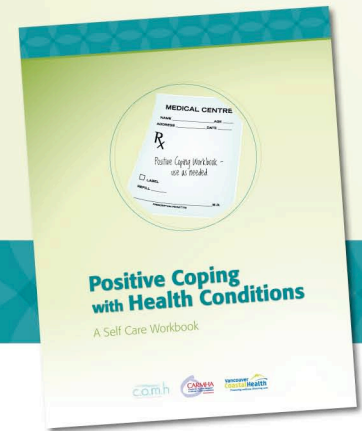
4. Practice relaxation in stressful situations

Certain kinds of situations are more likely to bring out anxiety or physical tension. For example, waiting for a medical appointment might increase anxiety because it’s linked in your mind to hearing bad news; or having an increase in pain might cause your muscles to become tense, as though this would somehow help the pain (actually, muscle tension can make pain worse). When you’re in one of these stressful situations, practice your portable relaxation method to lessen the tension and anxiety. The more you practice relaxation, the more skilled you will be at staying calm in all types of situations.

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MANAGING WORRY

1. Identify Worry Thoughts

Worry Thoughts can be recognized by at least one of these features:

- You think too much about a problem, to the point that it interferes with other activities.
- You imagine the worst possible outcome of the problem, magnifying the negative possibilities and ignoring any possible positive outcomes.
- You experience a high level of anxiety along with the worrying thoughts, whether the anxiety is felt physically (tense muscles, increased heart rate, rapid breathing, headache, stomach problems, etc.) or emotionally (fearfulness, apprehension, sense of impending doom).
- You have difficulty falling asleep or wake frequently during the night because of your worry.

Here are two common types of Worry Thoughts:

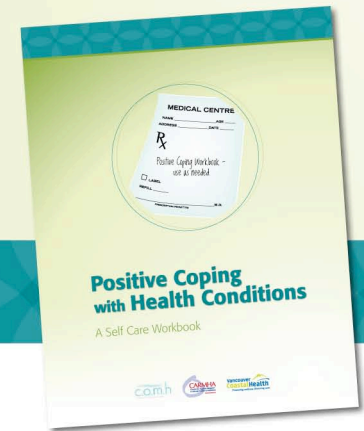
1. *Overestimating the likelihood that bad things will happen.* You tell yourself that a very bad outcome will certainly happen, even when you've been reliably told that a very bad outcome is unlikely.
2. *Catastrophizing.* You magnify how bad the situation is or how bad a future situation will be - you see the situation as more dangerous or unbearable than the facts justify.

Write down some Worry Thoughts that have been bothering you lately:

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2. Challenge these Worry Thoughts and replace them with realistic ones

Challenging Worry Thoughts involves deliberately *rethinking* the situation that contributed to your anxiety. Think of a situation about which you've been worrying.

Make a brief note about the situation. Write down the Worry Thoughts that were making you anxious. Then think about the situation and try to come up with more calming and realistic thoughts, using these **Reality Questions**:

Can I get more evidence, maybe by asking someone about the situation? It's often helpful to get another person's opinion about the situation.

Would most people agree with this thought? If not, what would most people think? Just by imagining how most people would react to a Worry Thought, you might be able to come up with a fair and realistic way of thinking.

What would I say to a friend, if my friend were in a similar situation? If a friend of yours were worrying too much, what would you say to her? It's likely that you would be able to help her think about the situation more fairly, looking at it in a more balanced way.

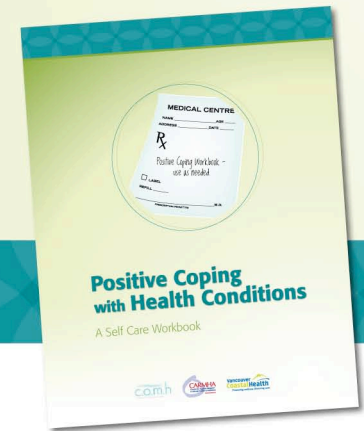
What will happen if I continue to think this way? It's important to understand what results are likely if you continue to worry excessively. Consider the effect of worry on your enjoyment of time with other people, willingness to try activities, ability to get restful sleep, physical symptoms, etc. What might be the results for you and others if you continue to worry excessively?

What is a more encouraging or useful way of thinking? Can you come up with another thought that would have better results? Is there a way of thinking that would be more encouraging and helpful in improving the situation?

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Example:

This is how Alice, a young woman dealing with chronic pain, answered these questions:

Worry Thought:

What if the pain just gets worse and worse, until I can't work anymore?

Can I get more evidence, maybe by asking someone about the situation?

I asked my family physician – she told me that my pain has likely stabilized and that I can probably make some improvements by participating in my pain management group. The group leader thinks I will be able to improve my activity level and my pain management.

Would most people agree with this thought? If not, what thought would they agree with?

My friends think I'm being too pessimistic – but I'm not sure they really understand what this kind of pain is like.

What would I say to a friend in a similar situation?

I would never say that kind of thing to a friend, especially when it's far from certain. It's too discouraging.

What will happen if I continue to think this way?

I've been so worried that it's been hard to concentrate at work. Also, I'm sleeping badly, partly because of worry, and that will become a big problem if it doesn't improve.

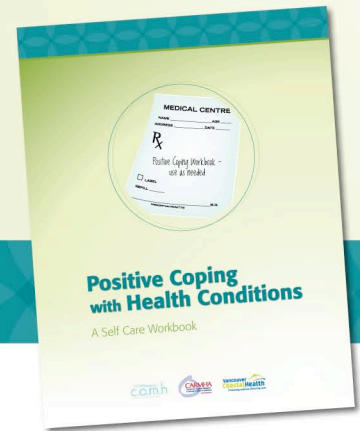
What is a more encouraging or useful way of thinking?

I need to keep reminding myself that my pain is most likely to stay the same or even get better – especially if I practice the pain management methods I'm learning in the pain group.

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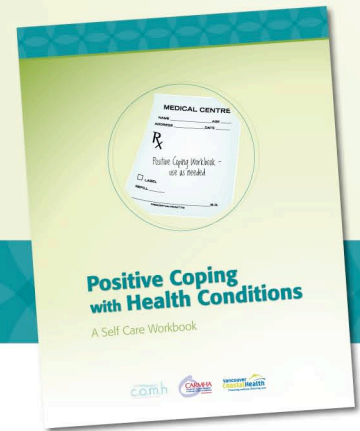
Here is a worksheet you can use to come up with more calming and realistic thoughts. Fill this in for one of your worry thoughts:

Worry thought:
Can I get more evidence, maybe by asking someone about the situation?
Would most people agree with this thought? If not, what thought would they agree with?
What would I say to a friend in a similar situation?
What will happen if I continue to think this way?
What is a more calming and realistic way of thinking?

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3. Practice calming and realistic thinking

It's not enough to come up with a calming and realistic thought just once. Worry Thoughts can repeat over and over, until they become automatic. More balanced thinking will help you feel better, but it won't be automatic – at least not for a while. The good news is that reducing worry doesn't take years. In fact, people who have been worrying excessively often begin to notice a difference after only a few weeks of practicing the worry management skill.

Stressful situations can trigger worry. Examples of stressful situations are:

- an increase in physical symptoms or pain
- forgetting to take your medication
- visiting a new specialist

In order to get the greatest benefit from this skill, you must pay attention to your thinking in situations that are likely to trigger worry.

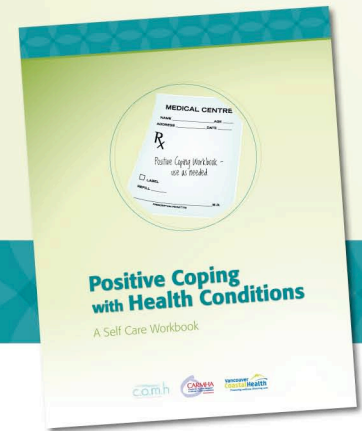
Write down a few situations where you often have Worry Thoughts:

When you find yourself in stressful situations, deliberately practice calming thinking. Don't assume that it will happen on its own. You have to tell yourself how to look at the situation, just as you might give advice to a friend. *Talk back* to the worry thinking. Don't allow excessive worry to occur without replying to it. Every time you talk back, you make the worry thinking weaker and the realistic thinking stronger. Eventually, realistic thoughts will have more influence over you than Worry Thoughts.

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In the beginning, realistic thinking can seem false. If your thinking has been distorted for some time, it can be difficult to see the truth. Imagine that you've been telling yourself *"What if I keep getting worse? What if my illness is more serious than my doctors realize? What if I'm the rare case?"* Having these thoughts regularly will cause you to feel anxious. Let's say you recognize this as unrealistic thinking and instead come up with a realistic thought: *"There's a high probability that I won't get worse, in fact that I will get better, so why waste my time thinking about very unlikely outcomes?"* At first, this realistic thought will seem false, as though you're just fooling yourself. Only with time and repetition will realistic thinking – **the truth** – begin to feel true. Eventually you'll come to accept realistic thoughts more naturally.

4. Schedule Worry Times

A big problem with excessive worry is that it happens while you're trying to do something else – watch a movie, talk with a friend or concentrate on a book. This leads to negative results: first, it's harder to enjoy these activities or do them properly; and second, you don't get to focus properly on the problems you're worrying about because you're distracted by the other activity! You can't watch a movie and think about an important problem at the same time. Both activities will suffer.

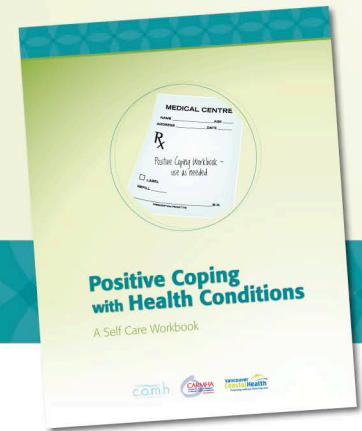
As we explained above, trying to force yourself to "stop thinking it" doesn't usually work. But what you can do instead is schedule a particular time during the week when you will concentrate on worrying about your problems. During this Worry Time, you're not allowed to do anything that would distract you from worrying. Schedule a particular time when you can set aside an hour just for worrying, making sure that you won't be interrupted during this important task. Make sure to write this Worry Time into your schedule and do it at the time you've set, and only at that time.

The aim of this scheduled Worry Time is to allow you to worry towards solution instead of in circles. When worry is done this way, it's more likely to help you resolve your problems. In order to get the full benefit from worry, set yourself up in a comfortable spot, maybe at a desk in a quiet area, and make sure you have paper and pen or a computer – whatever helps you think about problems and solutions. Scheduling Worry Times can increase the amount you are worrying in the short term – but in the long term, excessive worry will be replaced by problem solving.

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A useful way to organize your Worry Time is by using Problem Solving. It shows you how to approach your problems in a series of steps, like this example:

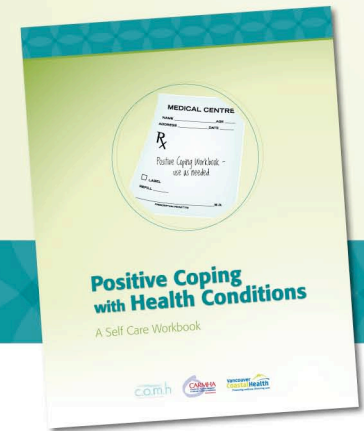
Problem: I'm afraid that if I do any physical activity, I will worsen my heart condition		
Action	Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Give up almost all physical activities, rest in bed most of the day. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ I won't be taking a chance on activity making my condition worse. ➤ I won't feel the anxiety I get when I'm out walking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The rehab nurse told me that becoming inactive will actually weaken me and worsen my health condition in the long run ➤ My world is much smaller now. It's kind of boring and I feel lonelier.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Stop being so concerned about physical symptoms, just go out and do lots of things every day, like I used to. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ That would be more interesting than staying home all the time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The nurse also told me that if I push myself too hard and tire myself out, I will "crash" and be unable to do much for a long time.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Pace my activities so that I am setting activity goals after checking with my health care providers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ It would be more interesting than staying home all the time. ➤ By checking with the rehab nurse and my doctor, I'm less likely to overdo it or worsen my health. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ I would feel some anxiety, so I would have to increase my activity goals slowly.

You can work on each of the problems you've been worrying about, one after another. You might want to make a series of folders, one for each problem, to store your notes and problem-solving activities. Then, when you settle yourself in your worry place, pull down the first folder and get to work figuring out possible actions to try in the next week. Once you've done all you can on that problem and have no further ideas, close that folder, put it back on the shelf and grab the next problem folder.

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Try to stay in your worry place until the scheduled time is over. If it looks like you haven't scheduled enough time for all the worrying you need to do, make the Worry Time longer next time. If it looks like you've scheduled too much time for worry, make it shorter. What's important is that your worries will get all the time they need.

If a Worry Thought pops into your head while you're trying to do something else like watch a movie, don't try to stop thinking it. That usually doesn't work. Remember that having a worry thought means you're concerned about a problem and you need to think about it – just *not right now*. Imagine that you gently place that Worry Thought in a folder on a shelf, as though you were telling it: *"You're important, so I have to think about you carefully – I'm going to put you on the shelf and bring you down during my Worry Time – you'll get all the time you need."* Often, reminding yourself, that worrying about the problem is delayed, not canceled, is enough to calm the worry.

5. Use these methods to protect your sleep

If you've been worrying too much, it might affect your sleep. You might lie in your bed tossing and turning, trying to fall asleep – but instead your thoughts are circling around the same worries. In the middle of the night, worries seem particularly upsetting – it's hard to be realistic at 3AM. It's easy to get caught up in catastrophic thinking. Here's what you should try:

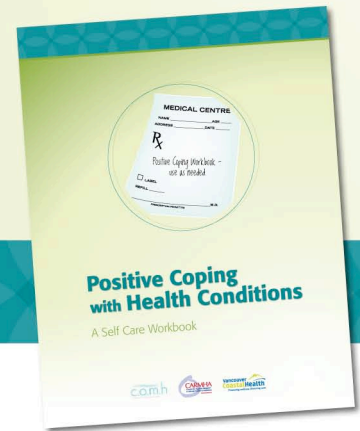
If you've been lying in bed for 20 minutes trying to get to sleep but worries are interfering, get out of bed. Go to your worry place and get the folders where you've been keeping track of your problems. Take down the first folder and read over what you've written about that problem. After you've read it over, ask yourself: *"Is there anything I've thought of or learned that I should add here?"* If the answer is No, then move on to the next problem folder. If the answer is "Yes" then add in your new information or plans and move on to the next problem. It probably won't take long to work through all of the problem folders – mostly, you'll be scanning over what you've already written during your Worry Time.

When you've looked over all of the problem folders, put them back on their shelf. Then, when you eventually start to feel sleepy, go back to bed. If the worries start up again in a way that's interfering with your sleep, review the problem folders again. Often only a few repetitions of this method are needed.

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WORRY & TENSION

Relaxation: Christine's story

Christine was a 52-year-old lawyer. She had always suffered from headaches as far back as she could remember. These were diagnosed as migraine headaches when she was 28. Every couple of weeks, one of these migraines would flood her with pain -- she would have to cancel appointments, go home and lie in a dark room. By the next morning, the pain would be tolerable enough that she could catch up with work. But she would be exhausted for several days. She tried a lot of different medications, but none of them gave her full relief. She accepted that she would have to build her life around the migraines. She also had 'ordinary' headaches several times a week, but these were easier to handle and she could usually ignore this kind of pain.

During a visit to her family doctor, Christine talked about how hard it was to deal with the headaches and to feel so powerless. She described how tense her shoulder muscles were and how difficult she found it to relax. The physician explained that sometimes migraines are triggered by ordinary "tension" headaches, so that better control of muscle tension might help to prevent ordinary headaches and perhaps help the migraines. The physician encouraged Christine to get a copy of the Positive Coping workbook and to practice the Relaxation skill.

Christine practiced the Relaxation three times a week -- every time she practiced, she got better at relaxing. Sometimes she would practice with the CD and sometimes on her own. She began using a 'portable' relaxation method in which she imagined her shoulder muscles gradually letting go of tension while she focused on Slow Breathing, repeating the words 'Deeply Relaxing' with her out-breath. She also increased her physical activity level -- she joined a yoga class, where she learned exercises that helped to relax her shoulder and back muscles.

Over the next few months, Christine became more physically relaxed. Her tension-type headaches were happening less often -- in fact, she could go a full week without having one. But, most importantly, she was having migraine attacks less often. Over the next year, as she continued to practice relaxation, she continued to have fewer ordinary headaches and fewer migraines. This really improved the quality of her life. She felt more in control of her own health.

This is an excerpt from the workbook **Positive Coping with Health Conditions**.

In the workbook, you'll find much more information, step-by-step coaching and stories about people who use these skills to deal with health conditions. You can download this book for free at www.comh.ca (It's 120 pages.) Or, you can order a printed copy for about \$15 at the same website.