

# Cystic Fibrosis Research News

**Title:**

Ways of Coping and Survival in Cystic Fibrosis: a 20-year Longitudinal Study

**Lay Title:**

Coping and Length of Life in Cystic Fibrosis

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**What was your research question?**

People cope with their cystic fibrosis (CF) in different ways. Those who cope in an optimistic way report that they are more able to do their treatments and have a better quality of life. We investigated whether coping in an optimistic way can also predict a longer lifetime.

**Why is this important?**

Ways of coping refer to how people act, think and feel when dealing with their CF. Some ways of coping are likely to be beneficial whereas others may be harmful. Studies show that people who cope in an optimistic way live longer than those who are pessimistic. We do not know if optimistic coping, or other ways of coping, are important for people with CF.

**What did you do?**

We assessed different ways of coping: optimism, hopefulness, distraction and avoidance, using a questionnaire that people with CF helped to develop. Optimistic coping reflects a resilient, and positive way of coping. The person accepts their CF, is optimistic about the future, determined not to let CF get them down and has confidence in health professionals. Hopefulness coping reflects a hope that things will turn out for the better. Distraction coping reflects an escape from the world of CF. People do things to forget CF and to feel better, such



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as treating themselves to something special, drinking alcohol or venting emotions. Avoidance coping reflects a 'denial' and their CF disease.

Then we followed people for 20 years and noted when people had died during this time. We measured the time between the coping assessment and either date of death or the end of the study period. We looked at whether any of the ways of coping could predict a longer lifetime, after considering other things that could influence the results, such as age, sex and lung function.

## **What did you find?**

Optimistic coping was the predominant coping strategy, although most people employed all four ways of coping to varying degrees. Women used more distraction and hopefulness coping, whereas optimistic and avoidance coping were used similarly by men and women. Those who reported above average levels of optimistic coping lived longer than people who used optimistic coping less often. None of the other ways of coping had any impact on survival.

## **What does this mean and reasons for caution?**

Ways of coping with CF are important and having an optimistic mindset is beneficial. Fortunately, psychological therapies can help a person cope more effectively with their CF. Ways of coping were only measured at the beginning of the study and although people tend to use the same coping strategies over time, we must be cautious about the results. If people had psychological therapies during the study that increased their optimistic coping, our results may have been weakened.

## **What's next?**

Individual psychologists use therapies that change coping strategies, but there is a lack of controlled studies to provide evidence of their benefits. We need to understand the impact of psychological therapies on coping, wellbeing, physical health and length of life in CF.

## **Original manuscript citation in PubMed**

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