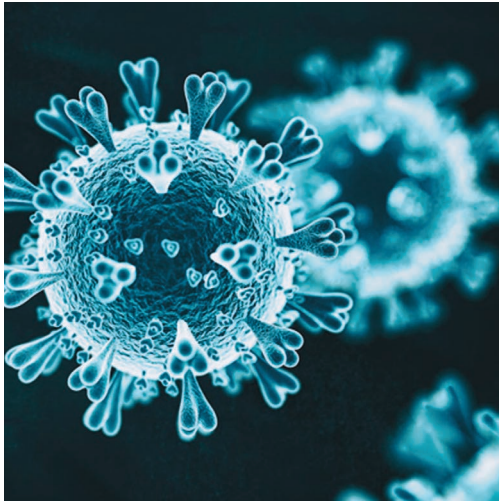


Patient Information

Coronavirus/ COVID 19

Managing your ongoing symptoms at home after coronavirus infection



This booklet is aimed to provide self-management advice for you to manage your symptoms at home. If you develop more severe symptoms, it is important that you contact your GP, MEDS, out of hour's service or in a medical emergency call 999.


manx care
Kiarail Vannin

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What is Coronavirus / COVID 19?

It is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

Signs and symptoms

Most people infected with the virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and symptoms and will recover without requiring treatment. Symptoms may vary but commonly are; a high temperature, a new, continuous cough, tiredness, loss or change of taste and smell or a new shortness of breath. Less common symptoms may be; a sore throat, nasal congestion, sneezing, headache, muscle or joint pain, diarrhoea, nausea or vomiting, chills or dizziness, a skin rash, Conjunctivitis (also known as red eyes).

If you have more serious symptoms such as difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, loss of speech or movement, new confusion, reduced consciousness, persistent chest pain or pressure in the chest or bluish lips or face, please seek immediate medical attention by calling 999. (This list is not exhaustive; please consult your GP or MEDS 'Out-Of-Hours' service for any other symptoms that are severe or concerning).

Recovery

On average it takes 5–6 days from when someone is infected with the virus for symptoms to show, however it can take up to 14 days. How long it takes to recover from COVID-19 is different for everybody. Many people feel better in a few days or weeks and most will make a full recovery within 12 weeks.

Managing your symptoms at home

People with mild symptoms who are otherwise healthy can manage their symptoms at home. This booklet provides advice to help you to manage your symptoms after Coronavirus infection and signpost you to suitable resources that may be beneficial.

Managing your cough

A dry cough is a commonly reported symptom for coronavirus. In some cases, it may be a productive cough with sputum/ phlegm. If you have a cough with sputum, your breathing might be noisier than normal and you may feel like it's more difficult to breathe.

The following basic advice may be helpful but more information can be found at;

<https://www.physiotherapyforbpd.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Your-guide-to-cough-control-A4-V2.pdf>

Managing a dry cough

Stay well hydrated.

Sipping a soft drink – take small sips, one after the other, avoid taking large sips, which helps to keep your mouth and throat moist.

Drink warm honey and lemon or another warm drink- this can help to soothe the throat. You can also try having a teaspoon of honey. But do not give honey to babies under 12 months.

If you do not have a drink to hand try swallowing repeatedly, this can work in a similar way to sipping water.

Suck a hard/boiled sweet.

Focus on breathing through your nose, rather than mouth breathing as this can help to reduce irritation of the airways. This may just be small breaths initially until the urge to cough has passed then more normal breaths can resume.

Avoid lying on your back. Lie on your side or sit upright instead.

If these do not help, you could contact a pharmacist for advice about cough treatments.

Managing a productive cough

You can help to keep your chest clear by:

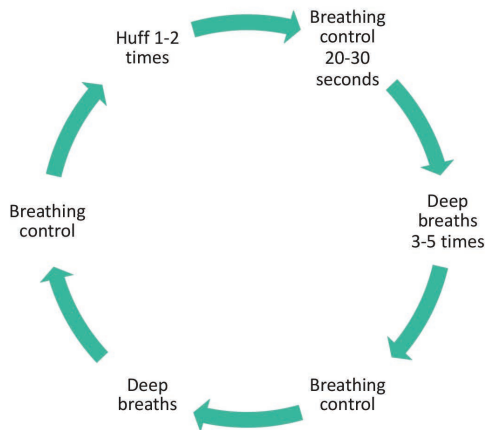
- Not staying in one position for long periods of time.
- Lying on your side can often help to move the sputum from the bottom of your lungs.
- Taking any inhalers, antibiotics or steroids you've been prescribed.
- Drinking enough water – the NHS recommends 6-8 glasses of fluid a day.
- Inhaling steam – pour hot water into a bowl and put your head over the bowl (avoiding contact with the water) and breathe normally. If comfortable, cover your head and the bowl with a towel. Do not use boiling water with children to avoid the risk of scolding.
- Keeping active- regularly moving around will help move the sputum.

Exercises to help clear your chest

Breathing exercises can also help to clear sputum and can conserve energy rather than coughing which can be tiring. You can try the active cycle of breathing technique, which can help clear your chest.

- Breathing control – breathing gently, through your nose if possible. Keep your shoulders relaxed. Repeat for 20 – 30 seconds.
- Deep breathing (Thoracic Expansion Exercises/ TEE) – taking a long, slow, deep breath in through your nose if possible, holding your breath for 2 to 3 seconds, and breathing out gently, like a sigh. Repeat this 3-5 times, if you do too many you may feel dizzy or light-headed.
- Huffing (Forced Expiratory Techniques/ FET) – breathing out through an open mouth instead of coughing. To huff, take a medium breath in and breathe out forcefully keeping your mouth open as if you are trying to mist a mirror. Repeat 1-2 times. You can do a small long huff, which will clear sputum lower down in your chest, or a big short huff, which will clear sputum higher up in your chest. This should move the sputum in your chest and it is normal to hear a 'rattle', you should be able to clear your secretions avoiding coughing. If you are wheezing, you may be doing too much and should return to breathing control.
- Finish the cycle on breathing control to allow your airways to relax.
- You should continue your exercises for about 10 minutes ideally until your chest feels clear.
- You can repeat this cycle regularly throughout the day.

Active Cycle of Breathing (ACBT)



More information about the active cycle of breathing can be found at:

https://www.acprc.org.uk/Data/Publication_Downloads/GL-05ACBT.pdf

<https://www.physiotherapyforbpd.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/YOUR-guide-to-chest-clearance-.pdf>

Managing Your Breathing

Many people report breathlessness as a symptom with coronavirus. This can be a result of inflammation so the effort of breathing is harder resulting in you breathing quicker and shallower. Anxiety can also raise your heart rate which in turn speeds up your breathing making you feel breathless.

If your breathlessness does not improve or worsens it is important to contact your GP or 999 in an emergency.

If you're feeling breathless, it can help to keep your room cool. Try turning the heating down or opening a window. Do not use a fan as it may spread the virus.

You could also try:

- Breathing slowly in through your nose and out through your mouth, with your lips together like you're gently blowing out a candle.
- Sitting upright in a chair.
- Relaxing your shoulders, so you're not hunched.
- Leaning forward slightly – support yourself by putting your hands on your knees or on something stable like a chair.
- Try not to panic if you're feeling breathless. This can make it worse.

What is normal breathing?

- Normal breathing is generally in and out through your nose to filter, warm and moisten the air (this may not always be possible if your nose is blocked).
- It should be relaxed and not forced and should be quiet.
- Your breath in should be shorter than your breath out (ratio 1:2).
- Breathing rate should be around 10-14 breaths per minute.
- It should be regular, rhythmical and relaxed.

There are some simple exercises you can try to help manage your breathlessness and help your breathing to be more relaxed.

Breathing control- to aid relaxation.

1. Get in a comfortable position.
2. Close your eyes and bring your attention to your breathing.
3. Breathe in and out through your nose (or mouth if you are unable to breathe through your nose).
4. Rest one hand on the top of your chest and one on your tummy, the hand at the top should be still and the hand on your tummy should move up and down with your breath.
5. Breathe in for 1 count and out for 2 (your breath out should be longer than your breath in).
6. If you notice areas of tension in your body, try to release this with each breath out.
7. Gradually try to make your breaths slower and deeper.

You can repeat this on regular intervals during the day and if you have periods where you feel breathless.

Positions of ease

Changing position may help to reduce your breathlessness and your effort of breathing.

Sitting leaning forward- sitting, lean forwards with your forearms rested on your knees.

Sitting leaning forward at a table – sitting, lean forwards with your elbows rested onto a table.

Sitting upright- Sit upright against the back of a firm chair. Rest your arms on the chair arms or on your thighs.

High side lying - Lie on your side, with a few pillows under your head and shoulders. Your knees and hips should be slightly bent.

Standing leaning forwards – lean forwards resting your elbows onto a solid surface.

Standing leaning backwards or sideways- lean back or sideways against a wall, with your feet slightly apart and one foot about 30cm away from the wall. Relax your arms by your sides.

More information and images about positions of ease can be found at;

[https://www.acprc.org.uk/Data/Publication_Downloads/GL-01HowtocopewithbeingSOB-positions\(1\).pdf](https://www.acprc.org.uk/Data/Publication_Downloads/GL-01HowtocopewithbeingSOB-positions(1).pdf)

Breathlessness and activity

Breathlessness is a normal response to activity but some people may experience more breathlessness completing simpler tasks after having an infection such as coronavirus. It is important not to completely avoid these activities and often using good breathing techniques can allow you to gradually build up your activities and reduce your breathlessness. Breathing control and positions of ease can be helpful but you can also try the following to help control your breathing during activity. Remember you do not need to rush.

Pursed lip breathing

1. Breathe in gently through your nose (or mouth if you are unable to breathe through your nose).
2. As you breathe out, purse your lips as if you were gently blowing out a candle.
3. Blow for as long as possible without emptying your lungs.

Blow as you go/ paced breathing (can be used with pursed lip breathing)

1. Breathe in through your nose before you make the effort.
2. Breath out whilst you make the effort.
3. Always breathe out on the hardest part of the task.

More information about breathing with tips on good breathing techniques can be found here;

<https://www.physiotherapyforbpd.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Post-Covid-Syndrome-breathing-final.pdf>

Supplementary Oxygen

If needed you may have been discharged with prescribed medical oxygen to help improve oxygen levels in the blood. This will be regularly assessed by your Consultant, doctor, nurse or respiratory physiotherapist.

Oxygen is flammable so no one should smoke or vape near it. It should not be used near naked flames. Inform your car and household insurance provider that you have Oxygen at home to ensure you are covered in the event of a claim.

Oxygen is not generally an effective treatment for breathlessness but if you have been assessed as requiring it to help your heart and lungs you may find you are able to do a little more before you feel breathless and that you recover quicker after activity.

You may have been advised of 'target' Oxygen saturations and be monitoring these. If your levels fall below you should contact your doctor.

More information regarding Oxygen can be found here;

<https://www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk/managing-the-effects/effects-on-your-body/managing-your-oxygen/>

If you experience;

- More shortness of breath.
- Have a headache, particularly in the morning.
- You feel unusually restless.
- You experience dizziness.
- Your breathing is more rapid.
- You feel confused

It is advisable to contact your doctor for advice.

Mouth care

Oxygen masks can cause your lips and mouth to become dry, ensuring good mouth care can prevent soreness and infection.

- Brushing your teeth twice a day with a toothbrush and toothpaste can help.
- Take regular sips of water.
- You can apply lip balm if you are not using the oxygen. Avoid products such as petroleum jelly.

Nutrition and Hydration

Eating well and maintaining a healthy weight is important to maintain your strength and fitness to ensure that your body has enough nutrients (energy, protein, vitamins and minerals) to help protect you from infection and recover from illness. You may not feel hungry or thirsty but it is important to eat and drink well.

Hydration - Typically, the average adult needs between 1.5 to two litres of fluid a day. This is the equivalent to around 6-8 mugs of fluid. Checking your pee is so important, as this is a way of monitoring your hydration. Our pee should be pale straw colour or clear. If your pee is dark yellow or orange, you need to drink more. If your pee is dark orange or brown, you may be severely dehydrated and drinking plenty of fluid is essential to restore your hydration levels. Try to drink regularly throughout the day (this does not include alcohol and fruit juice should be limited due to the high amount of sugar it contains).

Nutrition – a balanced healthy diet would contain protein foods for healthy strong muscles and the immune system; carbohydrate foods for energy; fruit and vegetables for fibre; essential vitamins and minerals to support your immune system and dairy foods which contain calcium and other minerals for strong bones and teeth. Try to avoid high-energy foods that are high in fat.

If you have a medical condition that is affected by your diet, please discuss this with a health professional. If you are unable to shop or are struggling to feed yourself, please contact Social services for advice and support (Adults **686179** / Children **686179**).

The British Dietetic Association have produced some more in-depth advice leaflets, Eating well, Improving your nutrition and Nutrition support during and after COVID-19 illness which can be found here: <https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/malnutrition-pathway-covid-19-leaflets.html>

If you are experiencing issues with fatigue or breathlessness, mealtimes may be a challenge but you can try the following techniques to help.

- Have smaller meals/snacks (6-8) throughout the day rather than 3 larger meals.
- Eat soft and moist meals. If you are having something dry, add a sauce to make it easier to manage.
- Eat slowly, sitting upright and keep your breathing even. If you are struggling, stop, rest and try again later.
- Ask family and friends to help with meal preparation or have ready prepared meals.

Swallowing

Some people may experience difficulties with eating and drinking after more significant illness with Coronavirus. COVID-19 can affect your breathing, which can interrupt the breathe-swallow pattern and can cause breathlessness when eating. Taking smaller sips or mouthfuls at a slow pace can help.

If you were in Intensive Care (ICU), the muscles may not have been used as much as you were asleep or unwell which can result in deconditioning. Over time, the muscles will rebuild strength as you begin to eat and drink again.

To help your swallowing:

- Make sure you are sat upright and are fully awake when eating and drinking.
- Take your time and small mouthfuls. Avoid distractions so you can focus on eating and drinking.
- Avoid talking as this opens the airway, which could result in food or drink going 'the wrong way'.
- Keep your mouth clean and healthy with regular tooth brushing.
- If your tongue is coated or your mouth looks unclean, speak to your GP or pharmacist.

More information about swallowing can be found at; <https://www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk/managing-the-effects/effects-on-your-body/voice-and-swallowing>

If you experience;

- Coughing or choking when eating and drinking.
- Throat clearing when eating and drinking.
- Gurgly wet voice when eating and drinking.
- Recurrent pneumonia.

You can speak to your GP who may refer you to Speech and Language Therapy if necessary. Or you can contact the team on 01624 **650128** for further information.

Voice

Some people may experience changes in their voice after Coronavirus, this may be due to the insertion of a breathing tube, it could be due to a chronic cough, dehydration, acid reflux or fatigue and stress. It is likely to improve in about 6-8 weeks.

There are things you can do to help your vocal recovery;

- Keep well hydrated.
- Avoid shouting.
- When possible try to avoid persistent, deliberate throat clearing.
- Steaming - pour hot water (nothing added to the water) into a bowl and put your head over the bowl (avoiding contact with the water) and breathe through your mouth. Do not use boiling water with children to avoid the risk of scolding.
- Hot compress- soak a flannel in hot water and wring it out. Press the flannel to your throat. You can repeat this throughout the day if it is helpful.
- Get enough sleep – fatigue can make the voice sound hoarse.
- Speaking/ breathing – speak in short sentences so you don't run out of breath.
- Always aim to use your normal voice, don't deliberately choose to whisper.
- Sugar free boiled sweets and chewing gum can help to stimulate saliva flow. Pieces of fruit may relieve dryness too such as orange, lemon and grapefruit alternatively apple, pear or cucumber which are less acidic.

Avoid- Caffeine and alcohol, smoking, irritants such as chemical, smoke and dust; avoid medicated throat lozenges as they can have a drying effect.

Further information can be found at; <https://www.britishtyngological.org/sites/default/files/Advice%20for%20post-COVID%20voice%20recovery.pdf>

More information about voice can be found at; <https://www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk/managing-the-effects/effects-on-your-body/voice-and-swallowing>

If you have ongoing concerns you can speak to your GP who may refer you to Speech and Language Therapy if necessary or you can contact the team on 01624 650128 for further information.

Managing Changes to Taste and Smell

Changes to your taste and smell are common symptoms of COVID-19 and can make eating and drinking less enjoyable. There is minimal data about the recovery of sense of taste following COVID-19 however, there is evidence that following other viruses it can return in a few weeks up to many months. This can result in changes to how food tastes and smells, for some people they lose their taste and smell and others can experience changes such as food tasting bland, salty, sweet or metallic.

How to improve the taste of food?

- Choose foods that appeal to you to ensure you are eating well. Keep retrying different foods as your taste preferences may change.
- Keep your mouth healthy and clean. Regular brushing of teeth and rinse your mouth with water if it feels dry. Avoid alcohol-based mouthwashes.
- If cooking smells affect your appetite you could try microwave ready meals or cold food as a short-term alternative.
- You can experiment with different flavours, textures and temperatures of food to determine what you find more edible (If you have been given advice regarding food textures from your Speech and Language Therapists due to problems with your swallow – it is important that you follow their advice).
- You could try bland flavours initially – plain chicken, fish, tofu and rice. This may also help if you feel nauseated or have an unsettled stomach.
- Cold or room temperature foods may be tolerated more.
- A good protein intake is important for your diet and recovery however high protein foods may taste bitter or metallic. You could marinate meats with sauces to reduce this. You can also try a variety of protein sources such as red meat, poultry, fish, eggs, cheese, vegetarian alternatives, beans and pulses.
- Adding strong flavours to food can help with taste. You can experiment with herbs, spices, sauces, pepper, chutneys and pickles in cooking.
- Sharp/tart foods and drinks such as orange, lemon and lime flavours can help to balance very sweet tastes.
- Salty or bitter taste changes may be improved by using low salt varieties or by adding sweet flavours such as sweetener, honey or sugar.
- If foods have a metallic taste you could try using plastic cutlery and use glass cookware.

The following websites provide more information about changes in taste and smell and offer support and advice in managing these symptoms;

<https://abscent.org/>

<https://www.fifthsense.org.uk/>

If your changes in taste and smell result in a significant weight loss it is important to discuss this with your Doctor or healthcare professional.

Fatigue

Fatigue is a normal part of the body's response to fighting a viral infection such as COVID-19. Fatigue may continue for some time after the infection has cleared. The fatigue is often experienced as overwhelming and is very different to everyday tiredness. Fatigue is often thought of with doing something physical but it is also from doing something cognitive (thinking), emotional or social.

Some people recover quickly without any additional support while others require more time and could benefit from using fatigue management strategies.

Recognise that fatigue is real and be kind to yourself. Explain to your family, friends and work colleagues the impact fatigue has on you. As fatigue is invisible, it is difficult for other people to understand.

By creating a toolbox to assist you can help manage your fatigue levels. Little bits of each strategy may help. Remember what works for someone else might not work for you; we are all individuals. The 3 P's principles (Pacing, Planning and Prioritise) learning to pace, plan and prioritise your daily activities will help you to save energy. Relaxation also has a crucial part to play. It is important to stay within your envelope of energy.

Pacing

Pacing is a way of doing activities differently to try to reduce the chance of increasing your fatigue, by breaking the activities up into manageable amounts. Pacing yourself will help you have enough energy to complete a task.

The key point is to rest routinely and consistently before you become exhausted as this allows the body to recuperate more quickly. Taking time out for 5 or 10-minute rest periods during an activity may be difficult at first, but it can significantly increase overall endurance and leave energy for enjoyable activities. For example, don't try to do all your chores in one go, just because you're feeling a bit better.

How you need to pace an activity may be different from someone else. Allow yourself enough time to complete the activity so you don't need to rush. It is better to rest before an activity has caused an increase in fatigue. It is common for people with fatigue to want to increase their activity levels, but this can lead to an increase in fatigue. Some people will get into a 'boom and bust' pattern where they push themselves to do more on a better day and then feel worse for several days afterwards. Try to avoid this by pacing your activities especially on a 'good day'.

Top tips:

- Breaking activities up into smaller tasks and spread them throughout the day.
- Allow plenty of time to complete and build rest into the activity.
- Rethink activities with rest in mind, sit and rest where possible. E.g. sitting instead of standing to complete a task.
- Plan rest and relaxation between activities.
- Breathe easily and properly during activities. Using these techniques helps to decrease shortness of breath.
- Avoid bust and boom (For more information refer to the Activities & Exercise section).
- Think 'time' not 'task', aim to do an activity within your activity tolerance for a set amount of time rather than completing the whole activity e.g. spend 10 minutes cleaning the kitchen instead of cleaning the whole kitchen.

Planning

Look at the activities you normally do on a daily and weekly basis, spread your activities out rather than trying to fit them all in one day. Develop a plan for how to spread these activities out. Think about when your activity levels are at their best; consider completing higher energy tasks at this time. For example if you have more energy in the evening but usually shower in the morning, changing the time of the showering may leave you with more energy.

Before starting an activity, it is useful to think about what you are required to complete for that particular activity and can it be broken down into smaller chunks. This can help you learn different ways to manage the limited energy you currently have and can help you gradually re-establish a sustainable routine.

Initially identify what you are currently able to do. Be kind to yourself; don't think about past activity levels. It may help to use activity sheets to record your activities in a week, using a journal, or talking to family or friends. This can help you establish a starting point. Keeping a record of what you have done and how you feel after each activity. It is also important to note good days. Activities can be physical, social, cognitive (thinking) or emotional and some can be more tiring than others. It may help you to identify unhelpful activity patterns such as 'bust and boom' behaviour and irregular sleeping patterns.

Top tips:

- Collect all items you need before starting a task
- Using an activity diary or a daily plan will help you to pace yourself and prioritise what you need to do
- Special adapted equipment is likely to make tasks easier. Please see the link below for the Independent Living Centre who would be able to give advice on equipment

<https://www.gov.im/categories/caring-and-support/independent-living-centre/>

Prioritise

When energy supplies are limited, it is useful to look at which activities are important to you in your day-to-day life and will help you to identify tasks that can be delegated to someone else or discarded to help you manage your fatigue levels. Prioritising activities is very individual and what might be important to one person might not be for others. Look at all the things that you do on a day-to-day basis, do you enjoy it and want to do it? Can it wait? Could someone else do it? Does it really need to be done? This is a good time to re-evaluate and put your needs and priorities first.

Top Tips:

- Can a friend or family member assist you with a task e.g. shopping or vacuuming, which would then allow you more time for more important tasks.
- Prioritise a task that makes you feel happy.
- Be kind to yourself and be flexible in daily routine, which could enable you to enjoy activities you might have missed otherwise due to fatigue.
- Ditch unnecessary tasks, chores or steps of an activity. Use shortcuts and loosen the rules.

For more information <https://www.rcot.co.uk/conserving-energy>

Rest

Achieving good quality rest can be one of the biggest challenges of managing fatigue. Your body still needs rest to continue healing, it is important to take short breaks throughout the day, even if you don't think you need to. You may find it difficult to switch off - even when you are fatigued, you may be turning over thoughts and anxieties in your mind, making it difficult to relax and unwind.

Many people have busy minds, which constantly have new thoughts, ideas and worries, and this is an additional demand on the body's low energy reserves. Learning how to rest your mind can be challenging but can be extremely helpful when dealing with fatigue. If you find yourself worrying during time you have scheduled for rest, try writing down your concerns and putting them aside. You will have more energy to tackle them once you have rested.

Could you ask yourself, are you able and willing to rest? It is important to remember that rest is a crucial part of managing and being in control of activity. It is not a sign of laziness or getting worse. It is important to understand the difference between not physically moving and actual relaxation. Some of the ways you could try to rest include: sitting, lying down, spending time in a quiet environment (such as the garden) or listening to music. You will need to experiment to find out what types of rest works best for you. Rest is not sitting looking at your phone or watching TV.

Relaxation

Rest is most effective when used in conjunction with relaxation. This is a skill, which can take time and practice before you master it, like learning to play the piano. If a strategy does not work for you, don't give up, you can try an alternative. Setting an amount of time that you are going to relax for is a good way to give yourself permission to take therapeutic rest and remove some of the feelings of guilt. Ideally use a form of relaxation for three times a day for 5-10 minutes.

Two relaxation techniques you could try

Grounding technique for when you feel anxious

Take a few slow breaths and ask yourself:

- What are five things I can see?
- What are four things I can feel?
- What are three things I can hear?
- What are two things I can smell?
- What is one thing I can taste?
- Think of these answers to yourself slowly, one sense at a time for at least 10 seconds focusing on each sense.

Soft Stomach breathing

Sit with a straight, vertical back. Place one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach. Take a deep breath as you inhale through your nose. Hold it. Did you pull in your stomach or push it out? Now exhale. Often people find they pulled their stomach in. This is restricting the space needed for your lungs to fully expand. So now try another breath, but this time push your stomach out and gradually inhale.

- Slowly inhale through your nose to the count of four, pushing your stomach out.
- Hold it briefly
- Slowly exhale through your nose to the count of five and relax
- Repeat for 5-10 minutes.

For more information

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/preventing-falls/fear-and-anxiety-about-falling/relaxation-techniques>

<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/tips-and-support/mindfulness/>

Sleep

You may find that you need to sleep more, this is normal whilst your body is fighting infection. As you are recovering, it is important to resume a sleep routine. You may still require more sleep as your body is healing, this is normal.

There are several factors that can affect your sleep.

- Altered activity levels can affect your normal sleep routine.
- If you are extremely tired and you are sleeping in the day this can disrupt your day/night cycle.
- Poor sleep can impact on your fatigue levels, so it is important to have plenty of good quality sleep.
- A lack of natural daylight can interfere with the production of melatonin, a chemical that makes us feel sleepy.
- Medications may also impact on sleep; you can discuss this with your GP.
- If you have been in hospital, you may have experienced some distressing situations and this can replay in your mind, or you can have disturbing dreams.
- Other symptoms such as a cough or breathlessness may impact on your sleep and sleep quality, so it is important to manage these symptoms.

What can I do to improve my sleep?

Sleep hygiene are some practical things that you can do to help you prepare for sleep. It is also important that you are taking care in other routines such as eating and activity as these can also impact on your sleep.

- Avoid having heavy meals before going to bed.
- Minimise stimulants such as smoking, caffeine and alcohol. Caffeine interferes with the natural process of going to sleep so you could have a warm milky drink instead. Alcohol can help you fall asleep, but it can disrupt your sleep.
- Develop a bedtime ritual to prepare you for sleep.
- Reduce light.
- Wind down with quiet time – reading a book, listening to music.
- Have a regular routine of sleep and wake times – use an alarm if needed.
- Stop using electronic devices at least 1 hour before bedtime. Ban screens from the bedroom.
- Environment - Keep the bedroom as a quiet, peaceful and relaxing place for going to sleep. Ensure the environment is free from disturbances like too much light or sound. Have it at a comfortable temperature – cooler preferably. Only use the bedroom for sleep and intimacy.
- Make sure your bed is comfortable. You can get more information about beds and mattresses at <https://sleepcouncil.org.uk/>
- Do not clock watch – if you are awake for longer than 20 minutes get out of bed, wind down and return to bed when tired.

- Try not to worry about sleeping, the more you worry, the more you will wake up.
- Keep a notepad by your bed to jot things down that come to mind. You can return to these thoughts in the day.
- You may benefit from a 30-45 minute nap but try to aim for this to be earlier in the day so that it doesn't impact on your night time sleep and try to reduce/stop this as quickly as possible.
- Try relaxation techniques to sleep - meditation, mindfulness, guided imagery, aromatherapy or relaxing music.
- If you are well enough, go outside and get some natural daylight, if you are not well enough even opening the curtains and sitting by the window can be beneficial.

There are more tips and resources available at <https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/mental-health-issues/sleep/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/>

Bad dreams may affect your sleep quality; you can try the dream completion technique which is available at <https://www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk/your-wellbeing/sleeping-well/>

If you are still struggling with your sleep please speak to your GP, they can look at short-term options like medications that may help or refer you onto other appropriate services such as talking therapies if indicated.

Cognition

Cognition means someone's thinking skills. It comprises our ability to remember things, use and understand language, attend to information and make decisions. People can experience a range of difficulties with their thinking skills post-COVID-19.

While recovering from COVID-19, some people experience brain fog. Brain fog is not a medical term but is used to describe a range of symptoms that affects someone's ability to think. Including poor concentration confusion, thinking more slowly than usual, disorganised, forgetfulness, finding it hard to focus, lost words and mental fatigue.

Brain fog can feel similar to the effect of sleep deprivation or stress. It is not the same as dementia and does not mean structural damage to the brain. People usually recover from brain fog.

To support your thinking skills consider the following:

For managing your attention and concentration problems

- Reduce distractions – find a suitable time and quiet place to complete a task.
- Ask people not to disturb you.
- Complete the task when you are not as fatigued.
- Take regular breaks.
- Don't rush things, take your time and pace yourself.

Managing memory problems

- For remembering to do things, aids can help: use your phone's calendar app, lists, post it notes, diaries and calendars.
- For remembering things you have done – You can enter notes into your phone, either by typing or using voice recorder. Equally, paper and pad can be a great help.

For further information

<https://www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk/managing-the-effects/effects-on-your-mind/memory-and-concentration/>

Activities & Exercise

Allow yourself to recover from the initial infection prior to increasing your activities and exercise. If you still feel fatigued after self-isolation but overall, you're improving, keep being gentle with yourself. Slowly try a small amount of light activity that is manageable (probably less than you think) with regular rests. Be mindful that you may feel more tired the next day. Be realistic and kind to yourself. Slowly increase activity levels - people often increase activity levels too quickly, which can set them back. Go slow and steady with activities and avoid pushing through fatigue.

If you did exercise or sports before getting COVID-19 you may need to reduce the level when returning to the exercise/sport and gradually increase it to return to your pre-COVID-19 level. Some people are able to return their original level with no issues but for some people they will need to have a phased return. If you find you are getting fatigued or have an exacerbation of your symptoms you are probably doing too much and need to reduce the amount of exercise you are doing to avoid symptom recurrence. It is a natural response to feel breathless when doing exercise however if you are too breathless to speak, slow down until your breathing improves. Aim for a moderate degree of breathlessness (breathless but not speechless). It is normal to want to return to your pre-COVID-19 level of exercise/sports but rushing to do this could result in a boom bust cycle, which in the longer term could delay your return.

What is boom and bust?

Our energy levels generally vary. On good days, we are able to exercise and complete our daily activities as you have more energy (boom). This may lead to you over doing things resulting in a few bad days when you are unable to complete the things you had planned (bust). The onset of a 'bad day' may have a delay of 24-48 hours but often people who monitor their activity/exercise notice this pattern emerging. This is known as boom and bust and can have a detrimental effect on recovery as we then avoid doing an activity and can lead to feelings of frustration and failure.

How to avoid boom and bust

The key to success is ensuring you don't overdo activity on good days, and make sure you remain active on bad days. This may seem difficult at first, but as you continue, trying a graded activity approach, you will find it becomes easier. Pacing will help you to set a baseline and will slowly allow you to increase your activity avoiding a boom bust cycle and will generally allow you to return to your exercise/sport/activity sooner.

You may need to adapt the exercise/activity that you were doing. Doing something such as walking is a nice way to gradually increase your activity levels. You could start walking for a short time on the flat, if this causes no problems you could increase the amount of time or distance that you walk and as this becomes more comfortable you could add in gradients or walking on different surfaces. It is important to do what you enjoy and what is meaningful to you. It may be helpful to set a time limit for your activity initially and increase the time gradually if you are having no issues. If you find your fatigue/symptoms worsen, you have probably progressed too quickly and need to return to the previous level. As you are able, you can start to increase the intensity and time of the activity returning to your baseline exercise/ sport or activity.

Joint and muscle pain

Joint and muscle problems are common and many people will have had them at some point in their lives, they are generally not serious and will improve and get better in about 6 to 12 weeks.

Following COVID-19 at home, it is likely that you had a period of reduced activity. If you were in hospital it is likely that your activity levels were even less. If you were in intensive care and spent a period of time sedated, your activity will have been reduced even more and you may have had to be moved by the nursing staff on a regular basis, which can cause more joint and muscle pain and stiffness. All of these situations can lead to weakness in your muscles, stiffness in your joints and on occasion changes in sensation, numbness and feelings of pins and needles. These again should resolve over time.

In many cases reduced activity can cause any aches and pains to feel worse so it is important to gradually increase your activity and movement but you may need to pace yourself and rest when you need to. Everything we do on a day-to-day basis is a general physical activity such as getting dressed, housework and moving around the house. Gradually build up your daily activities starting with easier activities building up to ones that are more physical.

What can I do to help myself?

- Painkillers- Simple 'over the counter' painkillers and creams can be bought at the chemists, your pharmacist can give you advice on what to use. If you take other medications discuss this with the pharmacist or GP.
- Posture/position – regularly change position; limit the time spent in one position and move around regularly.
- Heat/cold – you can try heat or cold or alternating hot and cold compression on your joints/ muscles to reduce swelling, reduce pain and help your movement. You can use an ice pack or bag of frozen veg or hot water bottle or wheat bag – do not apply directly to your skin to avoid burns. Apply for 20 minutes and repeat every couple of hours.
- Stretching may be beneficial also and you can try activities such as yoga or Tai Chi.
- Strengthening your muscles can also help – you can do things at home such as climbing the stairs, using weights, walking and you can make these harder as you feel able.

More information on how to self-manage your joint and muscle problem is available at <https://www.csp.org.uk/conditions/managing-pain-home>

If your joint and muscle problems are getting worse or other symptoms such as breathlessness or fatigue are preventing you from exercising or you develop new symptoms such as pins and needles, worsening weakness in your arms and legs, problems with your balance or if pain at night is affecting your sleep or if after 3 months your problems have not improved, it is important to contact your GP.

If you get a new, unexplained, red, swollen and painful joint or you develop numbness between your legs, or are unable to pass urine and control your bowels please seek medical attention immediately at accident and emergency. (This list is not exhaustive; for other urgent symptoms please refer to the Cauda Equina Syndrome information card at <https://www.macpweb.org/Resources/37b9fa6e-1b59-43fc-a2a3-d0a8f8430720>

Work/education

Returning to work or education after a period of isolation can sometimes be a challenge. Please discuss any concerns or worries you may experience with your employer/education setting on your return.

If you are absent from work for over 7 days you will need to contact your GP for a sick note for your employer.

You may have continuing symptoms which can make returning to work and education more difficult, it is important to discuss this with your education provider or employer so that provisions can be made to support your return. It may also be beneficial to discuss this with your GP and/or Occupational Health so that appropriate modifications can be put in place to enable you to fulfil your role. This may include reasonable adjustments, workplace modifications and a graded return if required.

More information on returning to work after COVID 19 can be found on the government website at;

<https://covid19.gov.im/general-information/returning-to-work-after-covid-19/>

<https://www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk/your-road-to-recovery/returning-to-work/>

Mental health

Having COVID-19 can be a frightening experience so it is understandable that it can have an emotional impact on people. Common feelings are fear, anxiety, worry, stress, depression, low mood, sadness, frustration and grief; these are all normal feelings when we are faced with times of uncertainty. Some common difficulties that people have are feeling anxious when breathless, worrying about your health or about family/friends getting ill, feeling low in mood and poor sleep. People who have been treated in hospital may also experience unpleasant images that may seem to come 'out of the blue', nightmares and feelings of panic.

FACE COVID-19 – How To Respond Effectively to the Corona Crisis is a helpful video you can watch at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmvNCdpHUyM>

These symptoms are often part of recovery following COVID-19. If you worry and think about your symptoms this can often make them worse. Physical and mental symptoms are often linked; if you are fatigued, this can affect your concentration, which in turn can affect your memory, which can increase your anxiety which makes you feel more fatigued. This can become a cycle but an improvement in one area should improve the rest. It is not an immediate fix but over time, things should improve. Symptoms such as palpitations, tense muscles, stomach problems, over-breathing and many more can be linked with our feelings. As our feelings improve, the physical symptoms can also improve.

What can help?

- Get enough good quality sleep (refer to the section on sleep for further information).
- Try relaxation techniques – meditation, mindfulness, aromatherapy, music and yoga.
- Speak to family and friends, as talking to others can help to reduce stress and they can support you.
- Healthy eating.
- Try to do activities that are enjoyable and relaxing. Gradually resume your daily activities and hobbies.
- Don't be too hard on yourself; remind yourself that recovery takes time. Give yourself time.
- Focus on what is in your control.
- Identify what triggers your symptoms.
- Challenge your thoughts – are you overthinking? Are you jumping to conclusions? Are there alternatives? It may not be as bad as it initially seems.
- Distract yourself.
- Avoid watching too much news or social media if this is making you feel anxious.
- Avoid Alcohol and drugs, as although they can help to blot out painful memories they will also stop you from coming to terms with what has happened.
- Avoid making major life changes- put off making big decisions and take advice from people you trust.

Grief and bereavement

It can be common to have feelings of loss and grief during your recovery. This may be linked to the loss of function, or it could be that you have experienced a sudden loss of a loved one or you may have witnessed the death of someone during your hospital stay. It may also be due to being unable to say goodbye in the usual way to a loved one, due to the restrictions around COVID-19. It is important that you deal with these feelings of grief.

Cruise Bereavement charity have resources available online to help at: <https://www.cruse.org.uk/understanding-grief/grief-experiences/traumatic-loss/coronavirus-bereavement-and-grief/> or you can contact Cruise Bereavement Care Isle of man on **668 191** or you can e-mail them at: info@cruseisleofman.org

Alternatively, you can contact the Isle of Man Samaritans on **116 123** (free from any phone) or **0330 094 5717** (local call charges apply).

The NHS Your COVID-19 recovery have additional resources available below.

<https://www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk/managing-the-effects/effects-on-your-mind/managing-your-mood-and-coping-with-frustration/>

<https://www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk/managing-the-effects/effects-on-your-mind/managing-fear-and-anxiety/>

<https://www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk/your-wellbeing/grief-and-bereavement/>

If you are struggling with your mental wellbeing, you can access the following services online: for adults <https://www.qwell.io/> or for children/young adults <https://www.kooth.com/>

You can also self-refer to the Community Wellbeing service on **642540** or <https://www.gov.im/self-referralCWS>

You can also contact your GP.

If your health is not improving or you continue to experience persistent symptoms after a few months that interfere with your normal everyday activities, it is advisable to speak to your GP.

Information collated from World Health Organisation, NHS England, Royal College of Occupational Therapy, Chartered Society of Physiotherapists, British Dietetic Association, British Lung Foundation, Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Respiratory Care, Physiotherapy for Breathing Pattern Disorders, Facets, The British Laryngological Association, The ME Association, The British Association of Clinicians in ME/CFS (BACME).

Post COVID-19 Patient Information packs- Humber Long Covid triage and assessment service, Homerton University Hospital, Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, Swansea Bay University Health Board, Derbyshire talking therapies, NHS Your COVID-19 recovery, Royal Papworth Hospital – Vocal Hygiene, NHS Inform Scotland.

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