

# Information Pack for Patients who have had COVID-19 or COVID-19 Symptoms

## Table of Contents

<b>What is Coronavirus (COVID-19)?</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Commonly Reported Symptoms:</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>How might I feel after having COVID-19?</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>What if I get breathlessness doing exercise?</b> .....	<b>3</b>
Positioning to ease your breathing: .....	4
Breathing Control (normal breathing): .....	4
Rescue breathing: .....	4
<b>How can I reduce my cough?</b> .....	<b>5</b>
You can suppress the urge to cough by: .....	5
Stop Cough Exercise: .....	5
<b>Fatigue management:</b> .....	<b>5</b>
What is fatigue? .....	5
Physical Fatigue: .....	5
Mental / Cognitive Fatigue: .....	6
What Can Impact on Fatigue? .....	6
<b>Pacing and Recovery</b> .....	<b>7</b>
Pacing: .....	7
<b>The Emotional Impact of COVID-19</b> .....	<b>8</b>
What can help? .....	8
Relaxation: .....	9
<b>Diet control:</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Diabetes:</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>Physical activity advice following COVID-19</b> .....	<b>10</b>
Simple exercises you can do whilst in the chair throughout the day: .....	10
<b>Social life and hobbies</b> .....	<b>12</b>

## What is Coronavirus (COVID-19)?

COVID-19 is a highly contagious virus that mainly attacks the lungs. It is transmitted through droplets created from sneezing and coughing from those infected with the virus. The virus enters the body via the nose, mouth and eyes.

## Commonly Reported Symptoms:

- New continuous cough.
- Fever.
- Shortness of breath.
- Loss of taste and smell.

## How might I feel after having COVID-19?

As well as the symptoms listed above, you may also suffer from significant post viral fatigue, muscle weakness and difficulties with memory or confusion. For some people, these symptoms can last for weeks or possibly months, especially if you have been in hospital or had severe COVID-19 symptoms. This pack contains information that will help you during your recovery.

## What if I get breathlessness doing exercise?

Getting breathless when you're active is a common symptom whilst recovering from COVID-19. Many tasks can make you breathless; for example getting dressed or walking around the home.

Being breathless can be frightening and make you more anxious. Anxiety causes adrenalin to be released into your bloodstream. Adrenalin makes your heart beat faster and harder and can increase your breathing rate. This can then make you more breathless.

Learning how to control your breathing can reduce your anxiety and feelings of breathlessness. When you are breathless, try not to panic. Your breathing will settle with the help of the following tips.

**Positioning to ease your breathing:**



Position for when you don't have a chair near you.

This position is good for when you are very tired.

**Breathing Control (normal breathing):**

Normal relaxed breathing involves breathing in and out gently through the nose. When breathless, people often breathe in and out through their mouth. This is not something to worry about as it's our body's natural coping mechanism. However you may find that with practise, breathing through the nose becomes possible and that it helps you to control your breathlessness.

Once you are in a good position try to let your shoulders relax. Concentrate on breathing gently in and out through your nose.

**Rescue breathing:**

If you cannot breathe out through your nose, try blowing out gently through your lips. Continue to breathe in through the nose if you can. Concentrate on making your breath out slightly longer and slower. You can rest your hand on your upper abdomen to feel it gently rise and fall.

If you find your breathlessness is getting worse and you are unable to control it, speak to your health care practitioner.

## How can I reduce my cough?

You may be experiencing a persistent, dry cough. This can be very irritating for you and can lead to inflammation in your upper airways. There are techniques that you can try to help to reduce the amount that you cough. By suppressing your cough, you can break the cycle of coughing and help reduce your symptoms.

### You can suppress the urge to cough by:

- Having regular drinks of water.
- Breathing in and out your nose rather than your mouth.
- Sucking on sweets/lollies.
- Sipping a honey and lemon drink.

### Stop Cough Exercise:

As soon as you feel the urge to cough, close your mouth and cover it with your hand (SMOTHER the cough). At the same time, make yourself SWALLOW. STOP breathing momentarily. When you start to breathe again, breathe in and out the nose SOFTLY.

Smother-Swallow-Stop-Soft is a good way to remember how to carry out the Stop Cough Exercise.

If you do need to cough, try to cough into a tissue or the crease of your elbow and ideally over 2 metres away from other people. Always wash your hands for 20 seconds after you cough. If you find you cough more at night, try to prop yourself up with pillows.

## Fatigue management:

### What is fatigue?

Fatigue is one of the most common symptoms experienced by people who have had COVID-19. For some it is the most troubling symptom and the one that affects them the most. All kinds of activities can be affected by fatigue: from going to work, seeing friends and family, cooking a meal or playing with your children.

People describe fatigue as an overwhelming sense of tiredness. This overwhelming tiredness can be physical or mental/cognitive in nature.

### Physical Fatigue:

Some people find that when they are fatigued their body feels overwhelmingly heavy and that moving at all takes enormous energy. It may be that specific muscles such as those in the hands or legs fatigue very easily dependent on the activity they are doing e.g. writing vs walking.

## **Mental / Cognitive Fatigue:**

Many people find that when they are fatigued it becomes difficult to think, concentrate or take in new information and that their memory and learning is affected. Some people find even basic word finding and thinking become difficult when their fatigue is high.

The fatigue people experience often seems to have very little to do with activity levels and even the most basic tasks can leave them exhausted. Some people wake up feeling as tired as they did when they went to sleep.

For some a rise in body temperature due to the weather, hot bath etc. may be sufficient to leave them feeling exhausted.

Fatigue affects people in different ways, and it may change from week to week, day to day, or hour to hour. It may also mean people have little motivation to do anything because they are so tired and/or know that doing even the smallest task will leave them exhausted.

This can all make it complicated to explain your fatigue to friends, family, colleagues and health and social care professionals. But helping others to understand your fatigue and how it impacts on you can make a big difference to how you cope with and manage your fatigue.

## **What Can Impact on Fatigue?**

There are a number of factors that can impact on your fatigue and make it worse. It is important that when you are trying to improve your fatigue each of these are thought about and steps taken to minimise their impact.

### **Medication**

Many drugs have side effects that can add to fatigue. If you have started a new medication, changed doses or altered the time you take the medication your fatigue levels may change. It is important to discuss this with your GP. Do not adjust your medication without discussing this first with your GP.

### **Other Physical Health Issues**

COVID-19 can result in a number of different health issues which still continue even after the virus itself has disappeared. It is important that any ongoing health issues are also being treated and are as stable as possible in order to help with your fatigue.

### **Sleep**

A lack of sleep or poor sleep quality can make fatigue worse.

This can be adversely affected by a number of things including pain, needing the toilet, insomnia, spending more time than usual inside, too much caffeine, alcohol, noise, temperature, mood (anxiety, depression), PTSD and flashbacks.

When thinking about your sleep and the effect it is likely to be having on fatigue it is important to consider each of these issues and make any necessary changes to minimise the impact.

## Pacing and Recovery

When recovering from any serious illness most people will experience ups and downs with their symptoms for a variety of reasons. People tend to use these symptoms to decide how much they do. So on good days they will try to do more, often trying to catch up and very often overdoing it. It is important to remember that all activity takes energy, whether it is physical, mental or emotional.

This results in a bad day when they might experience more symptoms and feel low and then they are able to do very little.

You might have noticed that when you overdo and the symptoms are worse you will need to rest more. Resting decreases the symptoms and you are tempted to be active again. This is called the 'boom and bust pattern' or 'activity cycling'.



### Pacing:

Pacing is a strategy that helps you to get out of this cycle and manage your activities without aggravating your symptoms. You develop an activity plan which allows you to stay within your current capabilities and therefore avoid 'overdoing.' The levels of activity can then be increased in a controlled way over time as your stamina increases.

By pacing your activities you are ensuring that:

- You are controlling the demands you place on yourself.
- These demands are in line with your current capacities.
- You are exposing your body and mind to these demands in a regular way.

By deciding that you will not overdo activity on good days, it is possible to avoid the severity of symptoms on bad days, therefore making it easier to predict the level of activity you will be able to achieve on any given day.

The first step is to think about how much activity you are able to carry out at the moment, even on a 'not so good' day. It is important not to compare yourself to others or to how

much you could do before you were unwell. From this, you will be able to set a baseline of activity – the amount of activity you will carry out every day.

Time	Activity
10am	Get up, wash and dress
11am	15 minutes on the computer
11.45 am	Prepare lunch for 30 minutes
2pm	Hoover one room
4.15pm	Walk around the block
9.30pm	Get ready for bed

Decide which kind of chart you would find the most helpful.

This may take a few attempts to get right, but once you feel you have found your baseline stick with it for at least a week before you feel tempted to increase.

When you are ready, you can gradually increase the amount of activity you are doing but be careful not to build up too quickly, as a general rule we usually suggest an increase of no more than 20%.

Once you have made an increase, you will need to keep the levels stable for a few days before increasing again.

As with a lot of changes you need to be making it is important to remind yourself of the fact that these changes are **FOR NOW**. It will help to talk about your fatigue with others and ask them for their support with the pacing that you do. Make clear to them as well that this is **FOR NOW**

## The Emotional Impact of COVID-19

The experience of having COVID-19 can be very frightening. It is very understandable that the experience can have an emotional impact.

Whether you have had mild or more severe symptoms, these are some common difficulties that you may be having:

- Feeling anxious when breathless.
- Worries about health or about family or friends getting ill.
- Feeling low in mood.
- Poor sleep.

If you were treated in hospital, you may also experience:

- Unpleasant images from your stay, that might seem to come ‘out of the blue’.
- Nightmares.
- Feelings of panic with any reminders of hospital.

## What can help?



- Avoid watching too much news or social media if it is making you feel anxious, try limiting yourself to looking at the news once a day.
- Speak to family and friends.
- Try to do activities that you find enjoyable and relaxing.
- Don't be too hard on yourself if there are some things that you are finding harder to do, remind yourself that recovery takes time.
- Focus on what is in your control like eating well.
- If you continue to feel overwhelmed by your symptoms, speak to your GP.

### Relaxation:

Relaxation is an important part of energy conservation. It can also help you to control your anxiety, improve the quality of your life and reduce pain and discomfort. Below are two relaxation techniques you can use to manage anxiety and help you relax.

### Grounding technique for when you feel anxious:

1. Take a few slow gentle breaths and ask yourself:
2. What are five things I can see?
3. What are four things I can feel?
4. What are three things I can hear?
5. What are two things that I can smell?
6. What is one thing I can taste?

Think of these answers to yourself slowly, one sense at a time spending at least 10 seconds focusing on each sense.

### Picture yourself somewhere calm:

Think of somewhere relaxing and peaceful. It could be a memory of somewhere you've been or a made up place.

1. Close your eyes, and think about the details of this place.
2. What does it look like?
3. What colours and shapes can you see?
4. Can you hear any sounds?
5. Is it warm or cool?
6. What does the ground feel like?
7. Spend some time imagining each of these.

### Diet control:

Eat a variety of foods to ensure you receive all the nutrients you need to maintain a balanced diet.

If you have a poor appetite or are losing weight, eat little and often, have frequent snacks throughout the day and opt for full fat options. See website below for more information.

If breathlessness is affecting you eating, have smaller meals and snacks more often, opt for softer foods that are easy to chew and swallow and ensure you take your time eating. See website below for more information.

If you are experiencing taste changes or loss of taste and require further advice please visit: <https://www.hct.nhs.uk/our-services/nutrition-and-dietetics-service/>

Drink plenty of fluids to ensure you stay hydrated - if you have recently been unwell, start with small sips and gradually drink more. For more advice around hydration please visit: <https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/the-importance-of-hydration.html>

### Diabetes:

You may over the next few weeks or months experience increase in low blood glucose levels (hypoglycaemia) or very high glucose levels (hyperglycaemia). This is due to changes caused to your body by the Covid-19 infection. We would strongly advise you to contact your GP, Diabetes Specialist Nurse or your hospital team. They will be able to support you further as you recover from the virus. For further information please visit [www.diabetes.org.uk](http://www.diabetes.org.uk) or <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/diabetes>.

### Physical activity advice following COVID-19

Spending time in hospital or being ill at home with COVID-19 can result in a significant reduction in muscle strength.

Stay active during your recovery will improve:

- The strength of your breathing muscles, heart and circulation.
- The strength of your arm and leg muscles.
- Your ability to resist infections.
- Your energy levels.
- Your wellbeing, independence and confidence.

as well as reduce your:

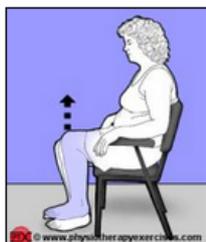
- Anxiety or depression.
- Stress levels and blood pressure.
- Risk of falling (by improving your balance).
- The risk of developing other problems associated with bed rest such as chest infections, bed sores, blood clots and reduced mobility.

Being active will give you back control of your condition and increase your independence, allowing you to return to your normal activities as soon as possible.

**Simple exercises you can do whilst in the chair throughout the day:**



1. Lift one leg up and aim to hold for 3 seconds. Repeat on the other side. Aim to build up to 10 repetitions on each side and up to 3 sets. Rest as needed to control your breathing.



2. March your legs up and down in the chair. Continue for as long as you can. Becoming breathless is normal. Rest when you need to. Repeat when ready, building up the time spent marching each session. You could also move your arms along with the marching.



3. Practise standing up and sitting down from a chair. Use your arms if you need to. Continue until you begin to feel breathless then rest. Aim to repeat 5-10 times.

You may wish to keep a note of how much exercise you do using this diary. It is important to carry out a wide variety of exercise each week if you can (walking, gardening, stretching etc.) but it is also important to have one or two “rest” days when you don’t do as much.

### Exercise diary:

Exercise	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
1							
2							
3							

Exercise	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
1							
2							
3							

Exercise	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun

1							
2							
3							

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
1							
2							
3							

## Social life and hobbies

When you have been seriously ill, you may feel differently about things and you may not want to do things you used to enjoy. You may not feel like seeing lots of people at once, find it hard to concentrate to read or watch T.V. Your concentration will get better and your memory will improve with time.