

# Rehabilitation Following COVID 19



## Patient Information Leaflet

### Local Therapy Team

Name

Address

Telephone Number

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# INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 is a disease caused by a type of virus called a coronavirus. This is a common type of virus that affects both animals and humans. Coronaviruses often cause symptoms like those of the common cold. But sometimes they can cause more serious infections.

Recovery from COVID-19 will take time. The length of time needed will vary from person to person and it is important not to compare yourself to others. Ongoing symptoms could last for several months after you contract COVID-19 and this can be perfectly normal.

This patient information leaflet is designed to cover some of the main symptoms of COVID 19. However, everybody is slightly different in their recovery, so it is important to understand that not all the sections may apply to you.

## WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF COVID 19?

Following COVID19, there are many effects that you may experience. This leaflet covers:

- Breathing difficulties
- Muscle weakness and joint stiffness
- Extreme tiredness (fatigue) and a lack of energy
- Loss of appetite and weight loss
- Problems with cognitive abilities
- Areas of dry, damaged or discoloured skin
- Sleep problems
- Changes in your mood, or anxiety or depression

**\* It is important to remember that not all symptoms you might experience will necessarily be COVID 19 related. If you are concerned about any new symptoms you develop as you recover from your illness please ensure you discuss these with your GP or health professional \***

# SECTION 1 - BREATHING DIFFICULTIES

The following section describes difficulties you may experience with your breathing. They include breathlessness or difficulty clearing your chest.

A support hub has been set up by Asthma UK and the British Lung Foundation to provide information and dedicated support for people who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and their family members. This can be accessed at: <https://www.post-covid.org.uk/> Leaflets are available at: <https://www.acprc.org.uk/publications/patient-information-leaflets>

## BREATHLESSNESS

Many daily tasks can make you breathless, such as walking, getting dressed or doing jobs around the house. Being breathless can make you panic or feel frightened. When you learn how to control your breathing these feelings will not trouble you as much and you will be able to do more. When you are breathless, **do not panic**. Your breathing will settle. Do not hold your breath when you do any general activities as this will make you feel more short of breath. Do not avoid doing things that make you breathless.

## WHAT POSITIONS CAN I USE WHEN I AM SHORT OF BREATH?

Choose a position from the suggestions below which suits what you are doing and where you are. When you are in any of these positions it is important to relax. Some of these positions will work better than others depending on your condition.

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SITTING LEANING FORWARD

Sit leaning forward with your elbows resting on your knees. Let your wrists and hands go limp.



### SITTING LEANING FORWARD AT A TABLE

Sit leaning forward with your elbows resting on a table. You can also put a few pillows or cushions on the table to rest your head on.





**SITTING UPRIGHT**

Sit upright against the back of a firm chair. Rest your arms on the chair arms or on your thighs. Make your wrists and hands go limp.



### STANDING LEANING BACK OR SIDEWAYS

Lean back or sideways against a wall, with your feet slightly apart and about one foot (30cms) away from the wall. Let your hands hang loosely by your sides, or rest them in your pockets. You may prefer to rest your hands or thumbs on your belt loops or waistband, or across the shoulder strap of your handbag.





### HIGH SIDE LYING

Lie on your side, with a few pillows under your head and shoulders. Some people like to use a foam wedge instead. A pillow between your waist and armpit can stop you sliding down the bed. Make sure the top pillow supports your head and neck.

Your knees and hips should be slightly bent. Depending on your lung condition it may be better to bend both of your legs or just your top leg.

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### STANDING LEANING FORWARD

Lean forwards resting your elbows onto a wall, a windowsill, a railing or a countertop. You could lean on a walking stick or a long umbrella if you use one. You can lean on a trolley while you are out shopping. A walking frame with wheels can be helpful.

### EXERCISES FOR BREATHLESSNESS

Use the exercises in this leaflet, to help you control your breathing.

When you learn how to control your breathing these feelings will not trouble you as much and you will be able to do more. When you get breathless, do not panic. Your breathing will settle.

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### BREATHING CONTROL

Breathing control means breathing gently, using the least effort. It will help you to use breathing control when you are short of breath or feeling fearful, anxious or in a panic. By using breathing control the effort of breathing is reduced.

Get into a comfortable position so that you can relax. Make sure that your arms are supported.

- Breathe in gently through your nose and breathe out through your nose, if you can. If you cannot breathe out through your nose breathe out through your mouth instead.
- If you breathe out through your mouth you can use it with 'pursed lips breathing' • Try to let go of any tension in your body with each breath out
- Gradually try to make the breaths slower
- Closing your eyes may help you to focus on your breathing and relax
- Do not force your breath

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### PURSED-LIP BREATHING

This exercise can be used at any time to help you control your breathing. You can also use it while you are doing something that makes you breathless and it will help you to feel less short of breath.

Breathe in gently through your nose, purse your lips as though you were going to blow out a candle or whistle. Blow out with your lips in this pursed position. Imagine “blowing out a candle” or whistling when you breathe out. Try to blow out for as long as is comfortable; do not force your lungs to empty.

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### BLOW-AS-YOU-GO

This exercise helps make tasks easier. You can use it while you are doing something that makes you breathless. You can use it with ‘pursed lips breathing’.

Breathe in before you make the effort. Then breathe out while making the effort. For example, when lifting a heavy bag, breathe in before you lift the bag and then breathe out as you lift the bag - “blow as you go”!

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### PACED BREATHING

This is useful when you are active, for example, walking or climbing stairs. You pace your steps to your breathing. You can use it at the same time as pursed lips breathing and ‘blow as you go’.

To use it when walking, count to yourself as you walk. For example, count 1 as you breathe in and then count either 2 or 3 as you breathe out. You can count for longer as you breathe in or as you breathe out if that feels better for you.

The right number for you will depend on you and your lung condition. Your counting should be in time with the steps you take. To use paced breathing while climbing stairs, breathe in and out in time with the steps you take. Do this in a rhythm that suits you. Here are some examples of how you could pace your breathing:

- breathe in when standing on the stair and breathe out as you go up a stair (blow-as-you-go!)
- breathe in as you go up one step and breathe out as you go up another step (in for 1, out for 1)
- breathe in as you go up one step and breathe out as you go up two steps (in for 1, out for 2)
- breathe in as you go up two steps and breathe out as you go up three steps (in for 2, out for 3)

### DIFFICULTY CLEARING YOUR CHEST

It may be difficult to clear your chest of sputum for a variety of reasons. There may be more sputum than normal, or it may be thicker/ sticky and harder to clear. Your lungs may not be expanding fully or it may be that you are feeling weak and therefore coughing is difficult.

Adequate lung expansion is key to your recovery for many reasons:

- Increases the volume of air inside your lungs.
- Improves the strength of your muscles which you use to breathe. *This can be imagined as a balloon, the more the balloon is blown up, the easier it becomes each time as the elastic is worked.*
- Helps to clear secretions if they build up in your lungs.
- Prevents collapse at the base of your lungs. *This can be imagined as a balloon which has sticky glue in the bottom of it when you attempt to inflate the balloon the top half will inflate however the bottom remains collapsed.*

### EXERCISES TO INCREASE LUNG VOLUME

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#### DEEP BREATHING TECHNIQUE

Take a long, slow, deep breath in through your nose if you can. Try to keep your chest and shoulders relaxed. Breathe out gently and relaxed, like a sigh. You should do 3-5 deep breaths. Some people find it helpful to hold their breath for about 2-3 seconds at the end of the breath in, before breathing out. Try the deep breathing exercises both with and without holding your breath and see which works best for you.

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#### BREATH STACKING

Breath stacking is a technique that can be used to help expand your lungs, keep the muscles flexible and help you have a stronger cough to clear your secretions.

Breathe out fully.

Take a small breath in through your mouth and/or nose and hold

On top of the air already in your lungs, take another small breath

Repeat until you feel you can't take in any more air into your lungs and hold for 2-5 seconds

Exhale all air out of your mouth. This will feel like a large breath out with a greater force

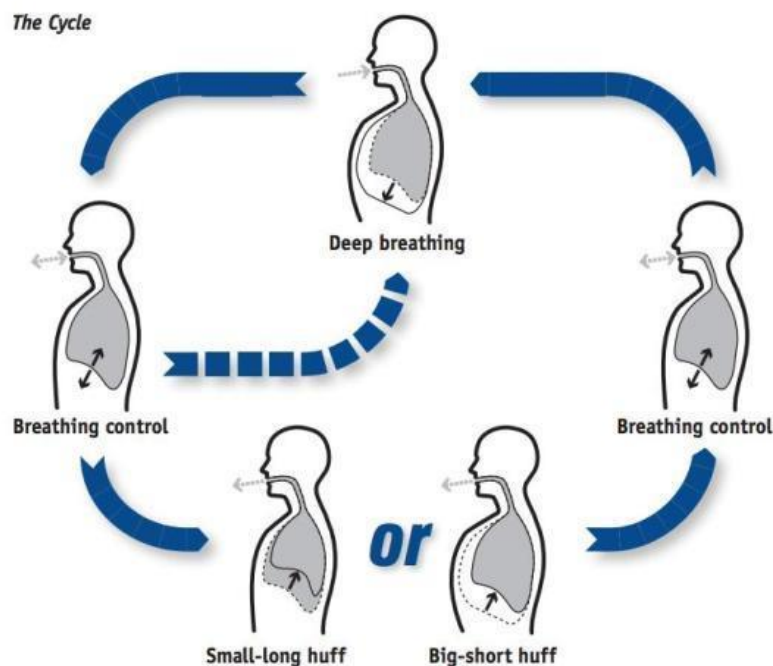
## WALKING

Simply walking around the house or your garden will help expand your lungs also help with the clearance of secretions from your lungs. This may be limited by your energy levels, but it is important to move around as much as you are able to. If you feel unable to get out of bed or your chair, simply sitting in an upright position will help you to have more effective coughs.

## EXERCISES TO HELP YOU CLEAR SPUTUM (PHLEGM)

## ACTIVE CYCLE OF BREATHING TECHNIQUE (ACBT)

Clearing your chest should be done often enough to keep it reasonably clear between doing the exercises. As you recover you may only need to do this once or twice a day for approximately 10 minutes. When you have more sputum, you may need to do it more often. When you are unwell or have more sputum, you may need to do shorter and/or more frequent sessions. There are 3 main stages to this technique and the sequence will vary for each person.



Source: ACPRC (<https://www.acprc.org.uk/publications/patient-information-leaflets/>)

### 1, BREATHING CONTROL

Breathing control is breathing gently, using as little effort as possible

- Breathe in and out gently through your nose if you can. If you cannot, breathe through your mouth instead
- If you breathe out through your mouth you can use breathing control with ‘pursed lip breathing’
- Try to let go of any tension in your body with each breath out
- Gradually try to make the breaths slower
- Try closing your eyes to help you to focus on your breathing and to relax

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### 2, DEEP BREATHING EXERCISES

Take a long, slow, deep breath in through your nose if you can. Try to keep your chest and shoulders relaxed. Breathe out gently and relaxed, like a sigh. You should do 3-5 deep breaths. Some people find it helpful to hold their breath for about 2-3 seconds at the end of the breath in, before breathing out. Try the deep breathing exercises both with and without holding your breath and see which works best for you.

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### 3, HUFFING

A huff is exhaling through an open mouth and throat instead of coughing. It helps move sputum up your airways so that you can clear it in a controlled way. To ‘huff’ you squeeze air quickly from your lungs, out through your open mouth and throat, as if you were trying to mist up a mirror or your glasses. Use your tummy muscles to help you squeeze the air out, but do not force it so much that you cause wheezing or tightness in your chest. Huffing should always be followed by breathing control. There are 2 types of huff, which help to move sputum from different parts of the lungs.

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#### THE SMALL-LONG HUFF

This will move sputum from low down in your chest. Take a small to medium breath in and then huff (*squeeze*) the air out until your lungs feel quite empty, as detailed above.

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#### THE BIG-SHORT HUFF

This moves sputum from higher up in your chest, so use this huff when it feels ready to come out, but not before. Take a deep breath in and then huff the air out quickly. This should clear your sputum without coughing

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### COUGHING

If huffing clears your sputum you should not need to cough. However if it does not clear your sputum, then you may need to. You should only cough if the sputum can be cleared

easily. It is very important to avoid long bouts of coughing as these can be very tiring and may make you feel breathless, or make your throat or chest sore or tight.

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### WHEN TO SEEK FURTHER ADVICE

If these techniques are not helping to improve your breathlessness or you are not able to clear your chest, contact your local rehabilitation team for advice. If your breathing deteriorates significantly or you are not able to get your breath, you need to seek urgent medical advice.



## SECTION 2 – PHYSICAL DIFFICULTIES

Following your illness, the slightest activity may take tremendous effort and can leave you feeling very tired. You may also have lost some weight and muscle strength and you will have lost approximately 2% of your muscle mass each day of your illness. It is likely that your joints will have become stiffer than normal due to reduced mobility compared to your normal levels of activity.

Some general guidance about exercise;

- Do not try to do too much too soon, because this will just make you overtired and disheartened.
- If you have a bad day, don't get upset about it. Everyone feels like that at some time. Ask yourself if you've been doing rather more than normal over the past few days. This may explain why you feel so tired.
- Don't worry about how long you exercise for. Judge how much exercise to do by how you feel. You should feel just a little tired after the exercise, **not exhausted**.
- As a rough guide, you should **not** feel your heart racing during the exercise and although exercise may make you a little breathless, you should **not** be so breathless that you cannot talk.
- You should stop exercising and seek medical advice if you experience any of the following: Severe chest pain, increase in chest tightness, dizziness or feeling faint and if you are experiencing much more breathlessness than you did the last time you did this exercise.

These are general exercises which may help, but if you have pre-existing medical conditions, they may not be suitable so may need to be tailored to suit you. If you are unsure if they are suitable, please contact your local rehabilitation team to discuss further. Wear loose, comfortable clothing and keep some water handy. Build up slowly and aim to gradually increase the repetitions of each exercise over time.

**With thanks to LaterLife training for use of their images and content**

**[\(https://www.laterlifetraining.co.uk/\)](https://www.laterlifetraining.co.uk/)**

SEATED EXERCISES

For these exercises, choose a solid, stable chair that doesn't have wheels.

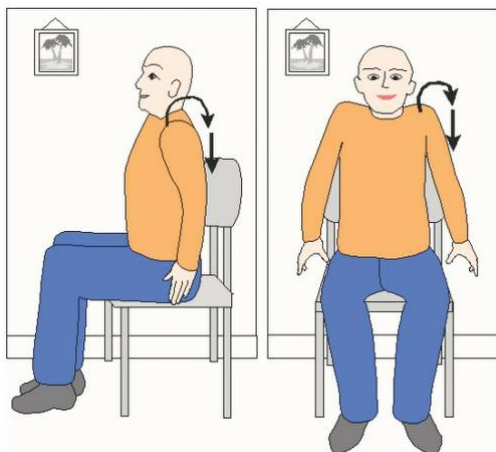
You should be able to sit with your feet flat on the floor and knees bent at right angles. Avoid chairs with arms, as these will restrict your movement.

KNEE MARCHING



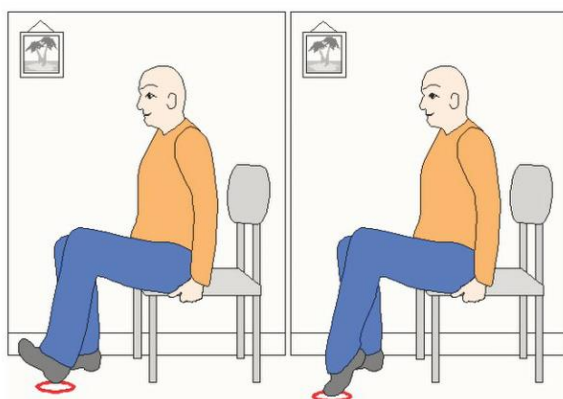
- Sit tall at the front of the chair
- Hold the sides of the chair
- March with control
- Build to a rhythm that is comfortable for you
- Continue for 1-2 minutes

SHOULDER CIRCLES



- Sit tall with your arms at your sides
- Lift both shoulders up to your ears, draw them back then press them down
- Repeat slowly 5 times

ANKLE MOVEMENTS



- Sit tall at the front of the chair
- Hold the sides of the chair •
- Place the heel of one foot on the floor then lift it and put the toes down on the same spot
- Repeat 5 times on each leg

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ANKLE STRETCH



Sit forwards in your chair and hold the sides

Straighten one leg placing the heel on the floor

Pull your toes up towards the ceiling

Feel the stretch in your calf

Hold for 10-20 seconds

Repeat on the other leg

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TRUNK TWISTS



Sit very tall with your feet hip width apart

Place your right hand on your left knee and hold the chair back with your left hand

Twist your upper body and head to the left

Repeat on the opposite side

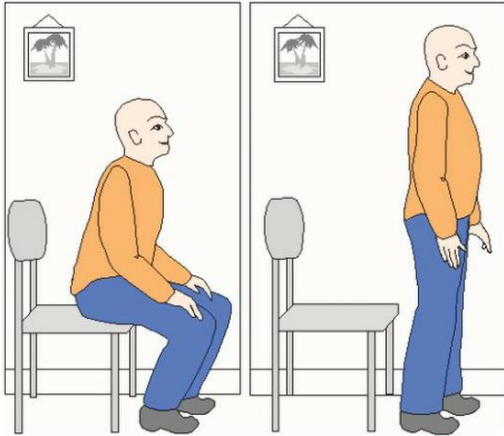
Repeat 4 more times each way

EXERCISES TO IMPROVE STRENGTH

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SIT-TO-STAND

## SECTION 2 – PHYSICAL DIFFICULTIES



Sit tall near the front of the chair

Place your feet slightly back

Lean forwards with a straight back

Stand up (using your hands on the chair if needed)

Step back until your legs touch the chair then slowly lower your bottom back into the chair

Repeat 4 - 8 times

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### MINI-SQUATS



Hold onto a surface if you need to

Bend your knees

Try and keep your back straight

Repeat

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### HEEL RAISES



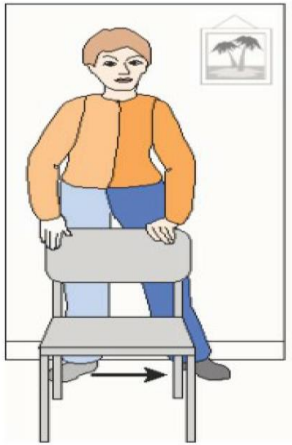
Stand tall, holding a surface if you need

Lift your heels off the floor and hold for 10 seconds

Repeat

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### SIDEWAYS LEG LIFT



Standing tall, hold on if you need to

Take one leg out to the side and back again

Repeat on each leg

### LOOKING AFTER YOUR SKIN

The Skin is an organ of the body and is affected by poor circulation, breathing problems, poor nutrition and hydration and lack of sun light. COVID-19 is affecting the skin of patients during the acute phase of the illness and those recovering from the disease.

Common issues:

- You may have dry skin for which you should use an emollient or moisturiser that can be recommended to you by your community nurse or GP practice or may have been given to you whilst in hospital
- You may have patches of skin discolouration particularly on your fingers, toes and face or you may have deeper wounds that are being managed by the community nurses or practice nurses.

With time all of these will heal but it is important to maintain your skin integrity and prevent further damage especially when seated or lying for prolonged periods. You can do this by regularly changing your position, keeping well hydrated, eating a balanced diet and going outside into the sunlight.

If you develop pain or discomfort over a bony prominence for instance buttocks or heel check the area of skin for redness or breaks. If concerned contact your community nurse or GP practice for advice.

### WHEN TO SEEK FURTHER ADVICE

## SECTION 2 – PHYSICAL DIFFICULTIES

If your physical ability fails to improve during your recovery from COVID 19, please contact your local rehabilitation team, community nurses or your GP.



## SECTION 3 - EXTREME TIREDNESS (FATIGUE)

People recovering from COVID 19 are often experiencing extreme levels of fatigue. We have included some general advice to help with managing this fatigue, but you may wish to speak to an occupational therapist to give you further advice.

Fatigue doesn't only affect your physical ability to do something it may also impact your thought process, concentration and attention. Sometimes the most basic mental task becomes a struggle. Tasks like reading, holding a conversation, watching television or following a recipe or instruction maybe difficult.

It's important to remember:

- Your energy levels will fluctuate from day to day and hour to hour.

- Prioritise tasks and reduce distractions.

- Think about the best time of day when you feel able to concentrate on tasks that require more attention

- Keep active, it is good to exercise, but do so wisely - pace yourself.

- Do activities that you are comfortable doing.

- When tasks are difficult take a break and come back to it.

- Wait an hour or more after eating prior to exercising.

- Start with short walks, or carrying out a simple task such as making a drink or sandwich and taking regular rests.

- Don't avoid domestic tasks but think about how you might do things differently

- Take your time and set small goals.

- Repetition and practice are key

- Aim to do a little more each day, but avoid "overdoing it".

### WALKING

At first, you may find walking difficult and may experience significant shortness of breath on exertion. Set short realistic goals, for example, walking to the toilet at first. Increase the distance you walk indoors perhaps to the front door, and progress this as you feel able. When you do start to go outside please remember to monitor how far you walk as wherever you walk to, you will require enough energy to walk back.

If you are finding climbing the stairs difficult you might want to consider downstairs living until your energy levels improve. An Occupational Therapist can provide equipment such as a commode if you require this for downstairs living. You can access this help by speaking with your GP or getting in touch with your local social services team.

### GETTING OUT OF BED

If you have spent long periods of time in bed your blood pressure may take some time to adjust. Standing up from the side of your bed too quickly may cause you to become dizzy. Taking your time will allow you to get your balance. Sit on the edge of the bed for some time before you attempt to move.

Once out of bed, it would be normal for most people to consider having a wash or a shower, this activity can be quite energy-draining so remember to rest before and afterwards.

### GOING TO THE TOILET

Going to the toilet is one of your many daily activities; this can contribute to a reduction in your energy levels. It is important to try and avoid constipation, as straining to open your bowels can cause increased demand on your energy. Make sure that you drink fluids and eat plenty of fruit and vegetables.

### SHOWERING

Please do not have a shower if you feel tired. It may be necessary to change your routine to shower when you have most energy. You might find that standing facing the shower causes you to become more breathless, therefore you may find it easier to have your back to the shower jet and ensure the room is well ventilated. You may also wish to consider resting before and after your shower to conserve your energy. A simple shower stool would allow you to sit down while you shower which may make it easier for you. Dry skin well after showering and apply an emollient or moisturiser.

If showering is currently too tiring you could consider completing a strip wash whilst sitting by the sink. Make sure you gather all your wash items before you start so that you have everything in one place.

### GETTING DRESSED

Prior to dressing try and ensure you have collected all the necessary clothing and have it close to hand.

Initially, you might want to wear clothes easy to put on such as slip-on shoes. You could ask a family member to help you with this if needed. Try to sit down when getting dressed, take your time, consider completing one part of the task and then have a rest.

Limit bending where possible, use long-handled equipment such as a shoe horn or helping hand

Make sure that you have given yourself plenty of time to complete your task and have a rest afterwards if needed.

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### WHEN TO SEEK FURTHER ADVICE

If you are struggling to manage everyday activities please contact your local rehabilitation team. They may be able to advise on strategies to help, equipment that may make your life easier, or signpost you to other services which may be able to assist.

## SECTION 4 – PROBLEMS WITH EATING AND COMMUNICATION

Some individuals who have had COVID-19 may have difficulties eating, drinking and swallowing. The extent of this difficulty varies and you may have managed to eat and drink normally, or if in hospital, you might have needed a tube to feed you. If we stop using our muscles, or use them less, they may become weak. Swallowing uses many different muscles and it can therefore be difficult if we have not had anything to eat or drink for a period of time. Eating and drinking might take more effort than usual; you may become tired more easily or feel breathless at times. Preparing meals may also feel more difficult than before especially if you are suffering from fatigue and breathlessness.

### GENERAL ADVICE

Some general advice for eating and drinking are to;

- Always sit up fully in a well-supported position (ideally a chair)

- Eat or drink at a slower pace and try to choose higher calorie drinks such as whole milk/fortified dairy alternatives or fruit juice

- Stop and rest if you are feeling breathless or tired

- Eat little and often throughout the day (3 smaller meals and 2-3 snacks throughout the day)

- Choose soft moist foods that slip down your throat easily and reduce the risk of choking or irritation which can trigger coughing. Soft foods also need less chewing which may help if you are tired or out of breath

- Take small sips or bites

If you are struggling with swallowing during your recovery seek advice from your GP or email the Community Rehabilitation Speech and Language Therapists directly on [rde-tr.SLTReferrals@nhs.net](mailto:rde-tr.SLTReferrals@nhs.net) or you can call 01392 402489.

### MOUTH CARE

Mouth care is important as it can prevent dryness and future infections. Breathing masks can dry out your mouth so it is particularly important to keep it clean if you have had any help with your breathing in hospital.

You may have experienced a dry or sore mouth, cracked lips or bad breath during your hospital stay. Mouth care is important to help manage this and prevent any future problems.

To look after your mouth:

Brush your teeth twice a day using toothpaste and consider using a mouthwash

Drink plenty of fluids (regular sips throughout the day)

If you wear dentures, remove them and clean both the dentures and your mouth twice a day and always take dentures out at night

Use lip balm if your lips are dry

### NUTRITIONAL ADVICE

What you eat is important in the treatment of a respiratory condition. Without enough nutrients, particularly protein, energy, vitamins and minerals, the body will start to break down muscle tissue in order to provide an alternative energy source. This can lead to reduced strength of the breathing muscles that may already be weakened.

Shortness of breath can cause difficulties when eating. Foods that require lots of chewing or foods that stay in the mouth for a long time can make it harder to breathe.

The tendency can then be to associate food with becoming short of breath and as a result, food intakes can become reduced. Good nutrition can help to reduce the risk of chest infections and promote effective management of your respiratory condition.

For people with specific nutrition needs, it is important to continue to follow the dietary recommendations made by your dietitian or other healthcare professional. This may involve asking friends or family members to get you specific foods so you can continue to follow an appropriate diet. The following is general advice to aid a higher calorie and protein diet to help support you to regain weight and strength and prevent further unintentional losses.

1. **Protein e.g. Meat, fish, eggs, beans, pulses. Protein is important to eat regularly as this is what the body uses to repair skin, muscles and other organs so is an important part of your recovery programme.** Try to have 2-3 portions/day such as a small chicken breast; 100g mince beef or vegetarian/vegan equivalent; 3 tablespoons of beans or pulses or 2 medium or large eggs. Add gravy, cheese or cream based sauces to help make swallowing easier and to add extra calories as well. Try to include two portions of fish each week, one of which should be an oily fish, for example: mackerel, trout, sardines or kippers. **Including protein in your diet shortly before or after exercise is best to help you rebuild your muscles and help to maintain or improve your mobility.**

2. **Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates –these foods are your main source of energy.** Include starchy foods such as, breakfast cereals, mashed potato, pasta or bread as part of your meals/ snacks. Aim to include foods from this group at each meal time and eat regularly. Try and opt for wholegrains where possible to help reduce constipation. The calorie and protein content of your starchy foods can be boosted further by adding, for example, butter/spread/ olive or rapeseed oil, fortified whole milk, cheese or avocado.
3. **Fruit and vegetables: These foods provide various vitamins, minerals and fibre.** Try to eat these with each meal in combination with something more nourishing as these are naturally low in calories e.g. add butter or olive/ rapeseed oil or salad dressing to vegetables or salad, dip raw vegetable sticks into hummus, or serve banana with custard or have fresh/tinned fruit and yoghurt. Remember, fresh, frozen, dried and tinned in juice, syrup or water all count towards your daily intake. Don't forget vegetables added to cooked dishes, for example tomatoes in a pasta sauce are included. Do not feel pressured to eat 5-a-day when you are not well as they can be quite filling but do not contain much energy. If you can, choose a variety of different types and colours of fruit and vegetables which will help to provide a range of different vitamins minerals and fibre
4. **Dairy and fortified dairy alternatives –These foods provide calcium, energy and protein.** Try to eat or drink three portions a day to meet most of your calcium needs. A portion is:
  - an individual pot of yoghurt
  - 1/3 pint or 200mls of milk
  - a small matchbox size piece or 30g of cheese.

Try to choose full fat versions where you can, for example, whole milk or full fat yoghurt.

**Fortified milk** - you can make this by adding 3 tablespoons of milk powder per pint of whole milk to boost the calories and protein content. Use this milk in cereals, puddings, soups, sauces, hot drinks etc.

5. **Sugar and fatty foods - are high in calories which are helpful if you are struggling to maintain or increase your weight.** Try to include sugary/fatty foods and drinks such as sweets, cakes, crisps. Oils and spreads are also good sources of fat. Opt for one that is low in saturated fat and made from olive, sunflower, rapeseed or vegetable oils. Use these for cooking or adding to food to boost energy intake and help you to maintain or increase weight.



## SECTION 4 – PROBLEMS WITH EATING AND COMMUNICATION

6. **Snacks and nourishing drinks – These will help you to eat more calories and protein.**

Try to have a snack or nourishing drink mid-morning, mid-afternoon and before bed. Good choices would be a full fat yoghurt or fortified alternative with fruit, mousses, custard, latte style coffee, malted milk drinks such as Ovaltine or Horlicks, hot chocolate, instant soup and fruit smoothies. Try to have 8-10 cups of fluid per day and include fluid rich foods such as soups, sauces, custard, jelly and ice lollies

7. **What if I have diabetes?** – Having a reduced appetite, changing your eating patterns or developing an illness can affect your blood glucose levels. The advice in this leaflet is applicable if you have diabetes and need nutritional support to gain or maintain your weight. If you notice a change in your blood glucose readings, discuss this with your diabetes healthcare professional who can support you with making any appropriate adjustments to your diabetes medication. If you are concerned about managing your weight and your diabetes, discuss with your GP who can refer you for further advice.

8. **I am now a healthy weight, what should I do now?** – If you have gained the weight you would like to or no longer wish to gain further weight and are feeling well please return to having a healthy balanced diet by swapping out some of the high fat and sugar foods for reduced fat or sugar versions and try to choose leaner cuts of meat and cook these without adding additional fats. If you have specific concerns about your diet please discuss this with your GP.

*For more information please see:*

<https://www.rdemembers.com/how-to-support-good-nutrition-and-diet-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

<https://www.malnutritionpathway.co.uk/covid19-resourcetool>

### COMMUNICATION

Communication refers to speech, voice and language. Talking can be more difficult if you are breathless. Your voice might sound weak, quiet, rough or hoarse. You may have a sore throat if you have been coughing a lot or if you needed a breathing tube in hospital.

A good breath is very important in helping us to speak in a clear voice that can be easily heard and understood by others. You may feel that your voice is weak and your speech is not as clear as it used to be. This should improve as your symptoms resolve.

**Here are some strategies of how to look after your voice and use clear speech:**

- Sit in an upright position
- Speak in shorter sentences
- Reduce background noise when communicating with others
- Avoid shouting or forcing your voice out
- Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water
- Reduce caffeine and alcohol intake
- If your voice feels tired, stop, rest and try later

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### WHEN TO SEEK FURTHER ADVICE

It is not unusual for your voice to sound weak when you are fatigued. If, when your physical strength and stamina has improved, your voice is still weak and/or hoarse you are advised to contact your GP for advice from a relevant healthcare professional.

## SECTION 5 – PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT

Being physically unwell has a psychological and emotional as well as a physical impact. It can also impact on your memory and thinking. Being severely unwell means you will probably go through a process of adjusting and recovery which may take time.

### ANXIETY

If you find that you feel low, anxious, or worried either when in hospital or once you get home please get in touch with there are some useful contacts listed in the back of this manual.

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#### WHAT IS ANXIETY?

Anxiety can have both psychological and physical symptoms. Psychological symptoms can include:

- feeling worried or uneasy a lot of the time
- having difficulty sleeping, which makes you feel tired
- not being able to concentrate
- being irritable
- being extra alert
- feeling on edge or not being able to relax
- needing frequent reassurance from other people
- feeling tearful

When you're feeling anxious or stressed, your body releases stress hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol. These cause the physical symptoms of anxiety, such as an increased heart rate and increased sweating.

Physical symptoms can include:

- a pounding heartbeat
- breathing faster
- palpitations (an irregular heartbeat)
- feeling sick
- chest pains
- headaches
- sweating
- loss of appetite
- feeling faint
- needing the toilet more frequently
- "butterflies" in your tummy

### POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

PTSD is an anxiety disorder caused by very stressful, frightening or distressing events.

Someone with PTSD often relives the traumatic event through nightmares and flashbacks, and may experience feelings of isolation, irritability and guilt. They may also have problems sleeping, such as insomnia, and find concentrating difficult.

The symptoms of PTSD can have a significant impact on your day-to-day life.

The specific symptoms of PTSD can vary widely between individuals, but generally fall into the categories described below.

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#### RE-EXPERIENCING

Re-experiencing is the most typical symptom of PTSD. This is when a person involuntarily and vividly relives the traumatic event in the form of:

- Flashbacks

- Nightmares

- Repetitive and distressing images or sensations

- Physical sensations such as pain, sweating, feeling sick or trembling.

Some people have constant negative thoughts about their experience, repeatedly asking themselves questions that prevent them coming to terms with the event.

For example, they may wonder why the event happened to them and if they could have done anything to stop it, which can lead to feelings of guilt or shame.

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#### AVOIDANCE AND EMOTIONAL NUMBING

Trying to avoid being reminded of the traumatic event is another key symptom of PTSD. This usually means avoiding certain people or places that remind you of the trauma, or avoiding talking to anyone about your experience.

Many people with PTSD try to push memories of the event out of their mind, often distracting themselves with work or hobbies. Some people attempt to deal with their feelings by trying not to feel anything at all. This is known as emotional numbing.

This can lead to the person becoming isolated and withdrawn, and they may also give up pursuing activities they used to enjoy.

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### HYPER-AROUSAL (FEELING 'ON EDGE')

Someone with PTSD may be very anxious and find it difficult to relax. They may be constantly aware of threats and easily startled. This state of mind is known as hyperarousal.

Hyperarousal often leads to:

- Irritability
- angry outbursts
- sleeping problems (insomnia)
- difficulty concentrating

### WHAT CAN BE DONE TO HELP WITH PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS?

There are several things that can be done to help with psychological problems during your recovery.

### GROUNDING EXERCISES

Sometimes in hospital there is just too much time to think - our mind over-works which is not usually a helpful process. It is important to work with your mind to try to help it be more of a friend to you.

Grounding your mind to focus on the here and now is important.

There are different ways in which we can help to ground our mind:

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### BREATHING

When we are anxious or upset our breathing becomes more rapid. We can feel better by deliberately slowing and relaxing our breathing. Anxious breathing is up in the chest, whereas relaxed breathing happens deeper in the belly

Relaxed breathing instructions

- Breathe in slowly and steadily through your nose for a count of 4 - don't rush this
- Pause for a count of 1
- Exhale slowly and steadily for a count of 4 - breathe out gradually.
- Repeat for a few minutes until you notice a change in how your body feels
- If you get distracted, or if your mind wanders, just bring your attention back to how it feels to breathe in and out

### SMELLS

If you are deliberately paying attention to a smell you are truly in the present moment. Try to find a smell that has positive associations for you – maybe one that reminds you of happy times, or a smell which you enjoy. Use it to bring yourself back to the present moment.

Helpful smells

- Small bottles of essential oils - e.g. eucalyptus, mint, lavender, lemon
- Small dried flowers such as lavender
- Perfume soaked on a tissue
- Whole spices from the kitchen

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### GROUNDING STATEMENT

We can sometimes forget that we are safe in the present. It can be helpful to write a 'grounding statement' to remind yourself that you are safe. You can read it if you become upset.

For example 'I survived and I am safe now'.

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### MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is about being aware of what is happening in the present, moment-by-moment, without making judgements about what we notice.

Our minds can be focused on things in the past, present or future. We often find ourselves thinking about events that have already happened, or worrying about things that could happen. Mindfulness is a practice which encourages us to attend to the present moment. There is good evidence that mindfulness practice can help people cope more effectively with a wide variety of feelings, including physical feelings such as pain.

#### HOW TO INCLUDE MINDFULNESS IN YOUR LIFE

- Choose an activity to do mindfully throughout the day, for one, two or five minutes. For example: Drink a cup of tea. Listen to music, watch something.
- Whatever you are doing, be in that moment, right now. See, hear, smell, touch, feel, breathe.
- Simply notice whenever other thoughts and sensations come to mind, then refocus on your chosen mindful activity.
- Be patient and compassionate with yourself.
- Describe... rather than judge good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant.
- It is as it is.
- It will pass.

**This following exercise might help. Simply name;**

- 5 things I can see
- 4 things I can hear
- 3 things I can touch or feel
- 2 things I can smell or like the smell of
- Take 1 slow deep breath

**For more information on mindfulness, please see <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mindfulness/>**

**For further advice and support on improving mental wellbeing please contact TALKWORKS 0300 555 3344 or visit their website TALKWORKS.dpt.nhs.uk**

## DELIRIUM

Delirium is a worsening of a person's mental state that happens quickly (over hours or days). It usually improves when whatever is causing it gets better. People with COVID 19 appear to be experiencing high levels of delirium during the course of their illness.

There are 2 main types of delirium;

In **hyperactive** delirium, the person becomes agitated and restless.

In **hypoactive** delirium, the person is drowsy and withdrawn.

People with delirium may experience symptoms that include:

- being less aware of surroundings
- being unable to speak clearly or follow conversations
- being confused
- having dreams that may sometimes be frightening and that may carry on when awake
- seeing or hearing things that aren't real
- thinking that people are trying to harm them
- being very agitated or restless
- being sleepy and slow to move or answer
- being reluctant to eat or drink
- having a change in personality

When caring for someone with delirium, it is helpful to:

- ensure hearing aids, glasses and dentures are available at all times
- have a gentle and friendly approach, smiling and providing reassurance
- talk and keep the person informed in short, simple sentences
- check that the person has understood you and be prepared to repeat what you have said, if necessary
- try to make sure someone the person knows well is with them, because familiarity helps
- try not to agree with any incorrect ideas caused by delirium but disagree tactfully and change the subject
- keep a calendar or clock (or both) within view
- bring in some familiar objects from the person's home to keep next to their bedside
- remind the person to eat and drink, and help if needed

*For more information on delirium, please visit <https://www.sign.ac.uk/assets/pat157.pdf>*



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND FURTHER ADVICE

**Devon:** <https://www.devon.gov.uk/coronavirus-advice-in-devon/document/community/#section-9>

**East Devon:** District Council's Coronavirus Community Support Hub available to help local residents, communities and organisations access information and support: Hotline on 01395 571500

The line is open Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm

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