



# Physiotherapy advice following recovery from Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Information for you

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This leaflet will give you physiotherapy advice to help you manage your symptoms now you are back home.

In this leaflet we will discuss different exercises and advice on aspects such as:

- Breathlessness
- Coughing
- Tiredness
- Pacing activity
- Physical activity and exercise
- Return to work

# Breathlessness

## Why am I feeling breathless?

This is a common symptom of Covid-19 which can be frightening but breathlessness itself is not harmful or dangerous.

If you are breathless you may notice that

- Your chest feels tight
- You find it difficult to catch your breath
- It is hard to control your breathing
- You are breathing more quickly and using extra muscles to help
- You tire quickly
- You feel anxious or panicky

## What can I do to help cope with this?

Knowing how to control your breathing can help you remain calm. Breathing control is a useful breathing technique which can aid breathlessness. It can be used during activity or while you rest to help relieve shortness of breath, or to aid relaxation if you are feeling anxious. You may find the following helpful to breathe more easily:

## 1. Pursed-lips breathing

Breathe in through your nose, then out through your mouth with your lips pursed, like you are whistling. This helps to slow your breathing down.

## 2. Breathing control

- Lie comfortably on your back with a pillow under your head and knees or sit comfortably on a chair. Place one hand on your stomach, with the other hand relaxed by your side.
- Gently close your mouth, lips together and keep your jaw loose.
- Breathe in gently through your nose, feeling your tummy rise and expand 'like a balloon' as you breathe in. Your breath should not be forced and silent.
- When you breathe in, your upper chest should be relaxed and not moving.
- Breathe out lightly through your nose if possible, without pushing, keeping your stomach relaxed.
- Make sure you relax and pause at the end of each breath out.

As you repeat this sequence be aware of any areas of tension in your body and concentrate on 'letting go'. For example, your jaw, neck, shoulders and hands.

### 3. Positions

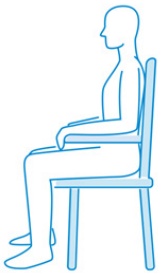
You can try these different positions to help you breathe more easily.



- Sit down and lean forward
- Rest both arms on your thighs
- Relax your hands and wrists



- Lean forward and rest your head and arms on pillows on a table



- Sit upright with your back against the chair
- Rest your arms on your thighs or arm rests
- Relax your hands and wrists



- Stand up
- Lean forwards with your arms resting on a ledge, for example a windowsill, handrail or back of a chair.

#### 4. Positions for resting and sleeping

You may find it helpful to try sleeping on your front or side with pillows for support.



Or in a more upright position using pillows for support.

If you wake up breathless, sit up and lean forwards at the side of the bed and practice the breathing control techniques as described above.

## Coughing

Coughing is the body's way of protecting our lungs and getting rid of things that irritate them. This is normal and important function. Following some infections we can be left with a dry cough because our lungs have been irritated. It can be difficult to control your cough, however there are a few techniques which may help.

### What do I do when I cough?

- If you have a dry, irritable cough taking regular sips of water may help reduce your coughing.
- If you cough when you go to bed consider using some of the positions discussed earlier or propping yourself up with a few pillows

- Avoid things that may make you cough, for example:
  - Smoking and smoky atmospheres
  - Use of air fresheners or strong smelling candles
  - Strong perfumes or deodorants
- It is important that you turn your face away from others and catch the cough or sneeze in a tissue or in the bend of your elbow. This will help stop the spread of infection. If possible please try to avoid coughing near other people.
- Try to avoid coughing or sneezing into your hands.
- Dispose of your tissue immediately in the bin and wash your hands if possible.

If you have phlegm which you are having difficulty coughing up, it is important to drink plenty of fluids and remain as active as possible. If you are still having problems clearing your chest, you may need to seek advice from a physiotherapist.

## **Tiredness**

### **What can I do to help with my tiredness?**

- Remember that tiredness is to be expected as you recover. Here are a few tips to help with this:
- Think about all the tasks you could do and decide which ones are the most important.

- Plan how you will do your activities before starting to avoid wasting energy. For example, gather toiletries and towels before walking to the bathroom to save multiple trips.
- Plan your activities for when you feel less tired. For example, you might feel better in the morning rather than the afternoon.
- Spread out tasks throughout the day. Take regular breaks and have a short nap if you need it.
- Give yourself plenty of time to do activities.
- Don't be too hard on yourself and accept that some days will be better than others.
- It's ok to ask for help if you need it.
- Sleeping well can help you feel less tired and can also help with your recovery and healing.
- Aim to go to bed and rise around the same time each day.
- Try to avoid caffeine in the evenings.
- Have a period of 'downtime' before bed. Limit your use of devices such as phones and tablets, minimising light and noise.
- Have a pen and pad beside your bed to write down any thoughts that come into your head at bed time.



If you feel tired, you may not feel like doing any physical activity. However, regular physical activity can give you more energy and make you feel less tired in the long run.

## **Pacing**

It is important to gradually return to normal activity after a period of illness. You should listen to your body, if an activity feels tiring it may be too much for that day.

It may be helpful to try this activity again the next day or at a time when you feel better. It can be very frustrating as your mind may feel that you should be able to do more than your body is allowing you to.

Remember, activity can be both physically and mentally tasking.

Pacing lets you plan your activity over the course of the day. Spreading activity and rest throughout the day will allow you to gradually increase your activity.

Some of this may sound overwhelming but an activity diary can help with these routines. Simply add activities you have completed during the day and think about a possible plan for tomorrow. You can also use this to look back on to see how you have progressed during your recovery.

## Anxiety

As Covid-19 is a new disease, researchers and healthcare professionals do not yet know its impact upon mental health. Feeling anxious, stressed or depressed can be very normal after a period of prolonged illness or a change in health.

If you have ongoing feelings of anxiety or depression that are not getting better as you recover you can speak to your family doctor (GP).

During your illness it is likely that you will experience shortness of breath which can be a frightening experience. Using breathing control, as mentioned in the breathlessness section, can be a great tool for helping episodes of acute anxiety.

## Physical activity and exercise

### How can I keep active?

Remember to stick to all guidelines that are in place with regards to social distancing and isolation.

If your walking is very limited, do as much as you feel able to do. Walking short distances regularly in the house is better than sitting for long periods. Little and often is key.

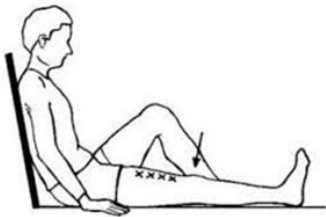
If you can, start by walking for around five minutes at a comfortable pace and aim to increase this by a couple of minutes each day. You should not feel too breathless and be able to chat and regain control of your breathing while walking.

It is normal to feel tired after any activity but you should not still feel tired the next day.

Here are some simple exercises you can do to help keep you active and keep your muscle strong as you recover. Aim to do these exercises three times a day. Please stop if you feel unwell or short of breath.



- Sitting or lying
- Wiggle your toes
- Briskly move your ankles up and down
- Repeat for 30 seconds



- Sitting supported in bed
- Tense your thigh muscle, squeezing the back of your knee down into the bed
- Aim to hold for five seconds
- Repeat ten times on each leg



- Sitting supported in a chair or edge of your bed
- Lift your foot off the floor straightening your knee out in front of you
- Aim to hold for five seconds
- Repeat ten times on each leg switching between left and right



- **Do not try this exercise if there are concerns about your balance.**
- Sitting on a chair
- Bring yourself towards the front of the chair
- Stand up using the arms of the chair if required
- Sit back down using the arms of the chair if required
- Repeat up to ten times as able

## Return to Work

Remember to stick to all guidelines that are in place with regards to social distancing and returning to work.

If you are self-employed or working from home, resist the urge to start work too early in your recovery. Your GP may be able to advise you about your return to work.

The length of time you need to remain off work will depend on your progress and any isolation measures as advised by your GP.

If you have a physically demanding or stressful job you may need to stay off work for a longer period. Where possible, leave the decision until you feel able to weigh up all your options.

A phased return to work may be recommended. This means that you gradually build up your hours and days, with lighter duties as appropriate. This would be discussed with your manager and/or Occupational Health department or Healthy Working Lives if your workplace doesn't have Occupational Health.

Do not be surprised if you find yourself tired when you return to work.

Just as being unwell is very individual, recovery is also very individual so please remember this at all times.

Please use this space to note any questions or concerns that you may have.

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If you have ongoing concerns regarding any of the issues highlighted above and feel you would benefit from further physiotherapy advice then please email your name and phone number to: [covid19.rehab@aapct.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:covid19.rehab@aapct.scot.nhs.uk)

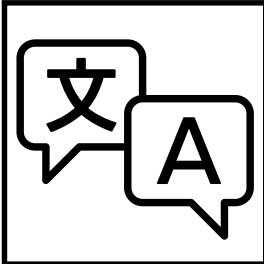
If you are reporting on your Covid-19 recovery, a member of staff will normally be in touch within four working days.

Please do not use this mailbox to report that you are acutely unwell, please use your normal reporting mechanisms via NHS 24 on 111 or your GP Surgery.

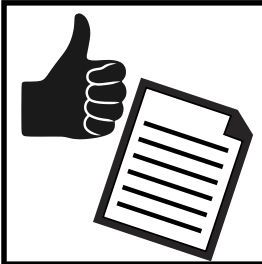
If your message is for information only it will be stored and filed safely and confidentially.

If you are already in contact with a physiotherapy team, please discuss your concerns with the team in the first instance.

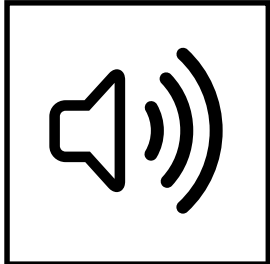
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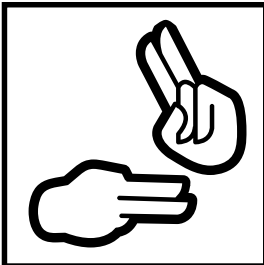
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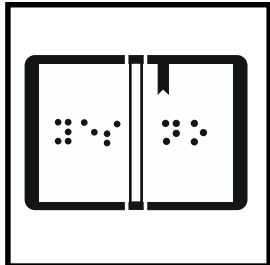
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