



Recovering after Coronavirus (COVID-19)

**Managing your Symptoms of Breathlessness,
Fatigue and Anxiety after COVID-19**

Contents

3 What is Coronavirus (COVID-19)?

3 What happens after having COVID-19?

4 Managing Your Breathlessness after COVID-19

- **Positions to manage breathlessness**
- **Techniques for controlling your breathing**

6 Smoking Cessation

7 Fatigue after COVID-19

8 Eating and Drinking after COVID-19

9 Physical Activity after COVID-19

9 Concentration and Memory after COVID-19

10 Anxiety and Emotional Impact after COVID-19

11 Relaxation Techniques

12 What If My Symptoms Don't Improve?

12 When Should I Speak to a Healthcare Professional?

13 Benefits and Financial Help

13 Social Prescribing in Lewisham

14 Contact Details

- **University Hospital Lewisham**
- **Queen Elizabeth Hospital Woolwich**
- **Guy's and St. Thomas' Hospital**
- **King's College Hospital**

15 References

What is Coronavirus (COVID-19?)

Coronavirus (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus that mainly affects the lungs. The virus spreads primarily through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

Most people infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience a mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness and may need to be admitted to hospital.

The main symptoms of coronavirus are:

- A high temperature – this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature).
- A new, continuous cough – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual).
- A loss or change to your sense of smell or taste – this means you've noticed you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal.

Most people with coronavirus have at least 1 of the symptoms above.

People are also commonly reporting:

- Extreme fatigue.
- Muscle aches and pains.
- Shortness of breath when moving around.
- Sputum production.
- Loss of appetite.

To find out more please visit the [NHS website Coronavirus](#).

What happens after having COVID-19?

You might find that your symptoms last for weeks or even months, in particular if you have been admitted to hospital. This information pack contains advice on how to manage some of the symptoms you may be experiencing.

You may be feeling breathless, extremely fatigued, have an ongoing cough, have difficulties eating and drinking as well as struggling with your memory and feeling confused. This means that you might find your daily activities (e.g. walking, washing, dressing, housework) much more difficult than before.

Managing your Breathlessness after COVID-19

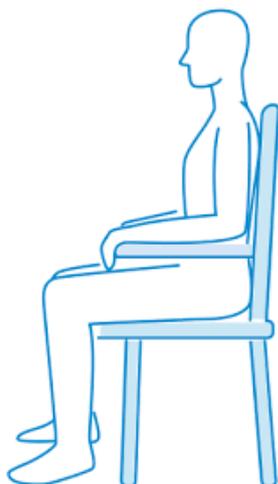
You may have ongoing breathlessness which you should monitor and if it is getting worse, seek medical advice from your GP or NHS 111.

Positions to manage breathlessness

The following positions may help ease your breathlessness and can be adapted until you find the best position for you.

Images reproduced from the [British lung foundation website](#) with permission.

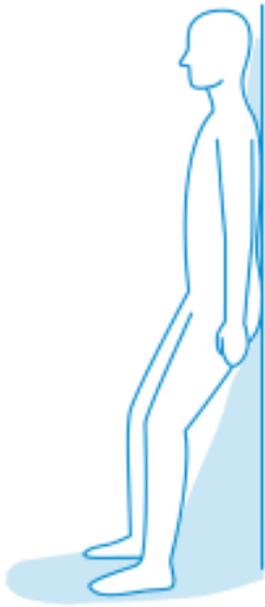
Relaxed sitting



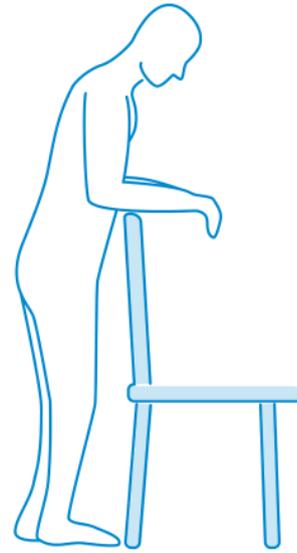
High side lying



Supported backwards standing



Supported Forward Standing



Supported Forward sitting



Forward Sitting



Techniques for controlling your breathing

- Get in a comfortable position, sitting with your shoulders relaxed and feet flat on the floor OR you can try this in the high side lying position.
- Close your eyes and take notice of your breath.
- Breathe in and out slowly through your nose (or mouth if you are unable to do this).
- Notice areas of tension in the body and try to release this with each breath out.
- Gradually try and make your breaths slower and deeper.

Pursed lip breathing

This can be used at any time. Breathe in gently through your nose, then purse your lips as though you're going to blow out a candle. Blow out with your lips in this pursed position. Imagine blowing out a candle when you breathe out. Blow out only for as long as is comfortable – don't force your lungs to empty.

Blow as you go

This helps makes tasks and activities easier. Breathe in before you make the effort. Then breathe out while you're making the effort. For example, when standing up, breathe in before you step or stand up, and then blow out as you stand up. Try pursing your lips as you blow out.

Paced breathing

Use this when you are walking or moving around. Count to yourself as you walk e.g. Count 1 as you breathe in and count 2 or 3 as you breathe out. You can take more steps as you breathe in or as you breathe out, if that feels better for you. Try different combinations to find what works best for you - for example, two steps in, two steps out.

Smoking Cessation

- Smoking tobacco products increase your risk of infection due to the harm caused to your immune system and lungs.
- Smoking is linked with poorer outcomes in COVID-19.
- It is never too late to stop.
- You can already start to see benefits within 24 hours after stopping.

You are four times more likely to quit if you engage with stop smoking services. Please visit the [Lewisham Stop Smoking Service website](https://onehealthlewisham.co.uk/).

Fatigue after COVID-19

You may feel really tired after having COVID-19 which means that your normal day-to-day activities are a struggle, and you might not feel motivated to keep active. There are a few strategies to help manage your tiredness.

The 3Ps Principle

Pace

- Give yourself permission to slow down. Don't expect to be able to do everything at once, or at the pace you used to do. Do less than you think you can.
- Break activities into smaller tasks and spread them throughout the day. You'll recover faster if you work on a task until you are tired, rather than completely exhausted.
- Build rests into your tasks and plan 30-40 minutes of rest breaks between activities. Resting is key to recharging your energy.

Plan

- Look at the activities you normally do on a daily and weekly basis; develop a plan to spread these evenly across the week.
- Think about which activities you find most tiring and make sure you spread these out, with plenty of time to rest in between.
- Don't try to complete several activities all in one go. This will drain your energy, and you will need more time to recover afterwards.
- If you find that your energy is lower or concentrating is harder at certain times of day, plan to avoid tiring activities at these times.
- Think about ways you can do activities differently to make it easier and less tiring. For example, you could sit down during tasks like washing and getting dressed. Rather than lifting and carrying items when cooking, try pushing and sliding them across the work surface instead.
- Rearrange rooms like the kitchen so the items you use most are easy to reach.

Prioritise

- Some daily activities are necessary, but others aren't. There might be some tasks that you usually do that you can stop altogether, do less often or ask someone else to do for you.
- When prioritising activities make sure you have a balance of things you need to do, like washing and dressing and things you want to do for fun and enjoyment.
- Start the day by asking:
 - What do I need to do; what do I want to do today?
 - What can I put off until another day?
 - What can I ask someone else to do for me?

Please visit [NHS Your Recovery Managing Daily Activities](https://www.nhs.uk/your-recovery/managing-daily-activities) for more information.

Eating and Drinking after COVID-19

While you are unwell with COVID-19 and recovering, you may experience loss of appetite and reduced food intake. It is normal to feel tired after being unwell, and recovery can take time.

You may find that it is much more difficult to go shopping, prepare food and eat as much as normal. You may also have some new symptoms associated with COVID-19 like changes in your taste or smell, shortness of breath, dry mouth, nausea and constipation. All these changes can mean it might be difficult to get the right daily nutrition to help you manage your daily activities and delay your recovery.

Why is it important to eat well after being diagnosed with COVID?

Eating well is important as your body needs energy, protein, vitamins and minerals for your recovery. You need to have an intake of protein and energy rich foods to help rebuild your muscles, prevent weight loss and maintain your immune system. It will also help increase your energy levels to allow you to do your usual activities.

If you are finding it difficult to eat a full meal at the moment, you should try to eat little and often with protein rich and energy rich foods e.g. meat, fish, eggs, pulses, cheese.

It is also very important to keep hydrated by drinking lots of fluids. Milk based drinks can help to provide additional nutrients.

You can ask your GP to refer you to a dietitian for further advice and support, and in the meantime visit [NHS Your Recovery Eating Well](https://www.nhs.uk/your-recovery/eating-well/) for more information and food ideas.

Physical Activity after COVID-19

Spending time in hospital or being ill at home with COVID-19 can result in a significant reduction in muscle strength, particularly in your legs. This can be for a number of reasons, but mainly due to inactivity. It is important to get back to your previous level of activity or aim to be even more active.

It's not harmful to get out of breath when doing physical activity, this is a normal response.

However, if you are too breathless to speak, slow down until your breathing improves. Try not to get so breathless that you have to stop immediately.

Remember to pace your activities. You might have been given some exercises to do in hospital or in the community by a physiotherapist. Start slowly and build up your level of activity over time, trying to do a little but often with lots of rest.

Please visit [NHS Your Recovery Getting Moving Again](#) for more information.

Concentration and Memory after COVID-19

Some people who have had COVID-19 find that their memory is affected and that it is difficult to hold information. You may also find it much harder to concentrate and focus than before. Most people will recover with no long-lasting effects, but you may find that it takes some time for things to improve.

How can I manage my concentration and memory difficulties?

It is useful to acknowledge and recognise that you are struggling with your concentration and memory. It may help to talk about it with your family and friends and think about ways of coping together. You may find it useful to use the 3Ps – Pace, Plan and Prioritise which is in an earlier section 'Managing Fatigue after COVID-19' to help cope with your daily activities.

Please visit [NHS Your Recovery Memory and Concentration](#) for more information and techniques on how to manage each problem.

Anxiety and Emotional Impact after COVID-19

You may feel very anxious and worried after having COVID-19 and this can take time to improve. Your mood may be low and you may have unpleasant memories of your experience. It is completely normal to feel this way and over time these feelings usually reduce but it may take weeks or even months for this to happen.

If you would like some support to manage your anxiety or low mood, please visit [Lewisham's Improving Access to Psychological Therapies website](#). You can self-refer to IAPT Lewisham and they will assess your current difficulties and carefully consider which service is right for you.

If you are having symptoms of breathlessness, this can cause feelings of panic and anxiety as well. One way to help with this is to practice relaxation techniques – please see the next section for details.

Please visit [NHS Your Recovery Managing Fear and Anxiety](#) for further help and advice on managing the emotional impact of COVID-19.

Relaxation Techniques

Please see [NHS Breathing Exercises for Stress](#)

This calming breathing technique for stress, anxiety and panic takes just a few minutes and can be done anywhere.

You will get the most benefit if you do it regularly, as part of your daily routine.

You can do it standing up, sitting in a chair that supports your back, or lying on a bed or yoga mat on the floor.

Make yourself as comfortable as you can. If you can, loosen any clothes that restrict your breathing.

If you're lying down, place your arms a little bit away from your sides, with the palms up. Let your legs be straight or bend your knees so your feet are flat on the floor.

If you're sitting, place your arms on the chair arms.

If you're sitting or standing, place both feet flat on the ground. Whatever position you're in, place your feet roughly hip-width apart.

- Let your breath flow as deep down into your belly as is comfortable, without forcing it.
- Try breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- Breathe in gently and regularly. Some people find it helpful to count steadily from 1 to 5. You may not be able to reach 5 at first.
- Then, without pausing or holding your breath, let it flow out gently, counting from 1 to 5 again, if you find this helpful.
- Keep doing this for 3 to 5 minutes.

Imagine you are somewhere calm

Create a picture in your mind of an ideal spot to relax.

- It can be real or imaginary.
- Somewhere you will find restful, calming, safe and happy.
- A place you would want to return to whenever you feel the need to relax.
- Imagine it in as much detail as you can – use your senses to make it as real as possible – and see yourself comfortably enjoying this place.

Now close your eyes and take a slow, regular breath in through your nose. Become aware of your breathing. Focus on your relaxation place in all its detail and breathe out through your mouth.

Do this exercise for 10 to 20 minutes.

What If My Symptoms Don't Improve?

The length of time it takes to recover from COVID-19 varies from person to person and it may vary from days to weeks or months. Try not to place high expectations on yourself, pace your activities and give yourself time to do things in a different way.

It might be helpful to keep a diary of how you are feeling as well as your symptoms and your achievements to remind you of your progress as you recover. Recovery may feel slow but looking back might be useful to remind you that you have improved.

When Should I Speak to a Healthcare Professional?

For most people who have had COVID-19 and are unwell enough to need hospital care, the following recovery times are expected:

- By 4 weeks most of the chest pains, and phlegm (sputum) should have reduced.
- By 6 weeks cough and feeling breathless should have greatly reduced.
- By 3 months most symptoms should have settled but tiredness may still be present.
- By 6 months symptoms should have all settled.

If you are admitted to intensive care, recovery may take much longer, possibly up to a year.

If you feel that you are not improving as quickly as you would expect or have concerns with your symptoms and your recovery, it may be useful to have a discussion with a healthcare professional. This may be your GP or the hospital team if you were admitted.

If you develop new or worsening symptoms, please seek medical attention as soon as possible.

If you develop new symptoms such as:

- Swelling of a leg or arm.
- Chest pain.
- Coughing up blood.
- Losing more weight /not wanting to eat anything.
- A racing heart.
- Muscle aches.

Please contact your primary care team.

Call 999 or 111 urgently for further advice if:

- You are coughing up blood.
- You have severe chest pain.
- You are getting more breathless.

Please visit [NHS Your Recovery When Do I Need To Seek Help?](#) for more information.

Benefits and Financial help

If you are unable to work, it is important to receive the correct financial help. You can contact Citizens Advice Lewisham for confidential advice online and over the phone for free.

W: <https://citizensadvicelewisham.org.uk/>

T: 0800 231 5453 to check what you can apply for, for example:

- Statutory Sick Pay
- Employment Support Allowance (ESA)
- Personal Independence Payment (PIP)
- Universal Credit

Social Prescribing in Lewisham

Social prescribing helps connect you with local services and helps to improve your wellbeing. It can be really useful to help with your recovery from COVID-19.

Examples of support include:

- Making appointments for housing, benefits and financial advice.
- Emotional support.
- Helping you with developing a healthy lifestyle and increasing your physical activity.
- Befriending, counselling, bereavement and peer support referrals.

For more details and to self-refer please visit [One Health Lewisham Social Prescribing](#).

Contact Details

University Hospital Lewisham

Physiotherapy Department, T: 020 8333 3148 E: LH.Physio-info@nhs.net Monday to Friday 7.45am and 4.45pm

You may also self-refer to the private physio service

<https://www.lewishamandgreenwich.nhs.uk/private-fitness-and-wellbeing-clinic>

Adult Therapy Team (LATT) community team of Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists and Rehabilitation Assistants

T: 020 8613 9222 E: lh.latt@nhs.net Monday to Friday 8am till 5pm.

Nutrition and Dietetics Department, T: 020 8 333 3314.

Speech and Language Therapy Department, T:0208 333 3004

E: lg.speechappointments@nhs.net

Queen Elizabeth Hospital Woolwich

Physiotherapy Department, T: 020 8836 6060

Nutrition and Dietetics Department, T:020 8 836 5062.

Speech and Language Therapy Department, T: 0208 836 4682

Guy's and St. Thomas' Hospital

Physiotherapy Department, T: 020 7188 5082 or 0207188 5089

Occupational Therapy Department, T: 020 7188 7188

Nutrition and dietetics Department, T: 020 7188 4128, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm.

Speech and Language Therapy Department, Guy's Hospital, T: 020 7188 6233,

or **St Thomas' Hospital** T: 020 7188 6246, Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital, please visit w: www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

King's College Hospital

Physiotherapy Department, T: 020 3299 3540 E: kch-tr.therapyappts@nhs.net

Occupational Therapy Department, T: T: 020 3299 3540 E: kch-tr.therapyappts@nhs.net

Speech and Language Therapy Department, T: 020 3299 8042

For further support with your recovery please see the resources below

NHS your recovery <https://www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk/>

Lewisham LGBT Forum <https://lewishamlgbtforum.wordpress.com/coronavirus/>

NHS 111 This service offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 111 w: www.111.nhs.uk

NHS website

This website gives information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you take control of your health and wellbeing. w: www.nhs.uk

References

1. [NHS website Coronavirus](#)
2. [Thameside and Glossop Integrated Care Post COVID-19 Patient Information Pack](#)
3. [Guys and St Thomas Recovery after Coronavirus](#)
4. [Oxford Health Post-COVID Leaflet](#)
5. [NHS Your COVID Recovery website](#)
6. [NHS Breathing Exercises for Stress](#)
7. [British Lung Foundation](#)