



York and Scarborough  
Teaching Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Recovery following Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information, please contact:

Physiotherapy Department

York Hospital

01904 723860 or 01904 727726

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
Introduction .....	3
How long will it take you to recover?.....	4
What is coronavirus? .....	4
Why did COVID-19 make you so unwell? .....	4
How may you feel? .....	5
What you may think? .....	6
How to conserve your energy .....	7
What to do to help your recovery .....	8
Breathlessness.....	9
Abdominal and tummy breathing.....	10
Breathe a rectangle.....	11
Sleep.....	12
Activity.....	12
Exercises to try at home .....	13-14
Nourishment.....	15
Other resources.....	16
Tell us what you think of this leaflet .....	18
Teaching, training and research.....	18
Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS).....	18
Leaflets in alternative languages or formats .....	20

# Introduction

The aim of this booklet is to provide you with information about coronavirus and what you can do to help your recovery whilst in hospital and at home.

Please note all of the advice and exercises in this booklet are suggestive of what may help with your symptoms and not a prescription. If you are unsure about any part of your rehabilitation please discuss with the physiotherapy therapy team, contact numbers on the front of this booklet.

Your experience of coronavirus may continue to affect you physically and emotionally after you go home. This experience may have been made worse because of visiting restrictions – people might not have seen quite how ill you were, so it is easy to understand why they might expect you to feel better very soon.

Your family and friends will be pleased you are home, but they may not understand what you went through or why you feel like you do. You will need their support as you recover so talk to them and explain how you are feeling.

## **How long will it take you to recover?**

Recovery involves your whole body and many people encounter all or some physical, cognitive, psychological and emotional problems during their recovery.

Recovery time varies for each person.

There are contributing factors that may affect your time to recovery such as age, medical history and length of stay in hospital or how sick you were.

The recovery period following coronavirus is largely unknown as it is a new virus. However the techniques in this booklet are known to help people with other long term conditions and recovery from illness.

## **What is coronavirus?**

COVID-19 was a novel coronavirus that developed in 2019. Coronaviruses are a family of viruses that cause disease in animals. Seven, including the new virus, have made the jump to humans, but most just cause cold or flu-like symptoms.

## **Why did COVID-19 make you so unwell?**

It is likely that your immune system overacted to the virus. This causes inflammation around your body and particularly your lungs. This as a result causes shortness of breath, low oxygen levels in the blood and difficulty breathing. If things get worse, some people need masks or ventilators to help them breath.

# How may you feel?

Everyone is different but you may experience:

- Fatigue
- Breathlessness
- Poor Appetite
- Change in vision or hearing
- Speech difficulties
- Problems sleeping
- Nausea
- Joint pains and muscle weakness
- Short term memory loss
- Loss of concentration
- Difficulty performing tasks that were previously simple.

## What you may think?

These are some common psychological and emotional problems people can experience:

- Low mood / mood swings.
- Anxiety about becoming unwell again.
- Wondering 'What if I hadn't survived'.
- Frustrated no one understands.
- Lack of interest in things you previously enjoyed.
- Loss of confidence.
- Flashbacks or nightmares.
- Feeling guilty.

While some people experience the problems listed others will not experience any and it is important not to compare yourselves to others. Be assured it is normal after any illness to experience changes. Give yourself time and seek support as you need it – you are not alone in your recovery.

# **How to conserve your energy**

When you are recovering from illness you are likely to have less energy and feel tired. Learning to pace, plan and prioritise your daily activities will help you save energy. For example climbing stairs:

## **Correct pacing approach:**

Climb five steps, rest for 30 seconds and repeat. You won't need a long rest at the top and won't feel so tired next day.

## **Not the big push approach:**

Climb all stairs at once. You'll have to rest for 10 mins at the top, and feel achy and tired the next day.

More information on conserving energy can be directed to you by an Occupational Therapist.

# What to do to help your recovery

There are a number of ways to help during your recovery period. These could include:

- **Time:** Give yourself time to recover.
- **Pacing:** Pace your activity and do not rush yourself. Your energy levels will fluctuate. Remember to work on things you enjoy not just what you ought to.
- **Space to talk:** Discuss with family, friends, health care workers how you feel and seek advice.
- **Self-care:** Look after yourself. Try to eat healthy nutritious food and drink plenty of water.
- **Sleep:** You need regular sleep to keep your body healthy.
- **Managing stress and anxiety:** One common challenge is accepting you were ill, understanding the illness and focusing on how to get better.
- **Diary:** Keep a daily diary of how you are feeling, sleep, activity and physical symptoms. Helps you to chart your progress.
- **Light exercise:** It is important to keep mobile, but you may not have the same energy as before.



# Breathlessness

Breathlessness can be very frightening and distressing, even in milder cases, and may be worsened by fears relating to coronavirus.

The following steps may help you feel more at ease. You may find some of these steps more helpful than others. Try them out and use the ones that you might find the most helpful.

Find a comfortable position for you and adopt one of the postures:

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



2. Stand leaning forwards resting your elbows onto something such as a wall, a windowsill or a countertop.



3. Lie on your side propped up with pillows under your body.



Tuck the top pillow into your neck to support your head. Rest your top arm on a pillow placed in front of your chest and your top leg on another.

## **Abdominal and tummy breathing**

Rest a hand on your tummy and breathe in gently to feel your tummy rise. Then breathe out slowly through your nose or your mouth. Rest and wait for the next breath to come. You may find it helpful to purse your lips while your breath out slowly as though you were making a candle flicker.

## Breathe a rectangle

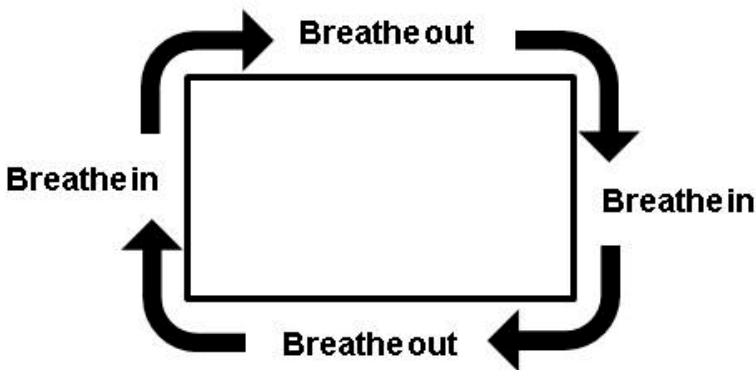
This helps to stay focused on your breathing exercise.

Begin by finding a rectangular object that your eyes can easily focus on i.e. TV screen/door frame/ picture frame.

Breathe in through your nose while tracing your eye along the short side of the rectangular object and slowly breathe out with pursed lips, tracing your eye along the longer side.

Once again it is important that your breath out is longer than your breath in. For example in for two seconds out for four and possibly build up to breathing in for three seconds and out for six.

Breathe a rectangle image:



# **Sleep**

Sleep and rest is an important part of your recovery. You may find you need to sleep more but it is essential that you try to remain in a regular daily day / night routine. Routine helps your body stabilise itself.

Healthy sleep habits such as winding down prior to bed; a warm bath, relaxation exercises, reading a book all help to ensure better sleep. Try avoiding caffeine, eating late, or using electrical devices such as phones and laptops an hour prior to bedtime

# **Activity**

Increasing your daily activity will help with your day night pattern. And regular exercise will improve your muscle strength, cardiovascular fitness and mental health.

Being active outdoors (being mindful of government guidelines) is excellent for mental and physical well being. Initially find a route around a local park or even down your road where you can monitor the distance you manage each day; either counting lampposts or with a pedometer. Slowly aim to increase your daily distance and set yourself small goals.

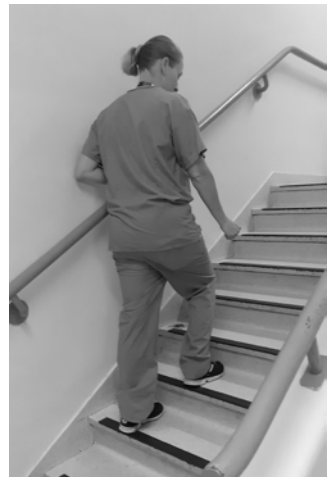
# Exercises to try at home

You can add some of these exercises into your daily routine or when you are unable to access outside. These are aimed at whole body strengthening and conditioning. If you have specific concerns or weaknesses contact a physiotherapist via your GP:

1. Walking on slopes or uneven surfaces such as grass.  
Add into your daily walk when you feel confident.



2. Walking up and down stairs.  
Aim to add one extra flight stairs initially then increase every two days.



3. Sit to stand from a chair with your arms across your chest. Repeat five times initially.

**Easier:** use your arms or use a higher chair.

**Harder:** Chose a smaller chair.



4. Wall push ups  
Repeat five times initially.



# Nourishment

Even if your appetite is decreased or you have lost your taste and smell it is essential to try to keep your normal routine of three meals a day.

Good nutrition helps to rebuild your muscle strength and aids your rehabilitation. Including high protein containing food and/or drink at every meal e.g. milk, dairy, meat, fish, beans.

It is also important to keep well hydrated as when you are unwell with a temperature you quickly become dehydrated. Drink regularly throughout the day taking small frequent sips, aiming for eight cups of fluid daily.

**If you have any concerns about your eating and drinking at home speak to your GP or local dietitian. Further advice can be found online...**

Nutrition advice after having COVID-19 if you have a poor appetite and/or unintentional weight loss  
<https://www.malnutritionpathway.co.uk/library/covid19yellow.pdf>

## **Other resources**

**The NHS COVID recovery website:**

[www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk](http://www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk)

COVID recovery

NHS Lancashire Teaching Hospital: COVID-specific guidance

<https://bit.ly/358zBqT>

### **NHS library**

<http://library.nhs.uk/coronavirus-resources/older-people>

How to manage post-viral fatigue after COVID-19

<https://www.rcot.co.uk/how-manage-post-viral-fatigue-after-covid-19-0>

### **Exercise**

British Lung Foundation exercise videos to support patients to exercise at home:

<https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/keep-active/exercise-video>



The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy Get Up & Go falls prevention exercise videos

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8s-8KtfgFM&list=PLLaYpsruKX9LtUQ2EFLbRHWbPUrDorPms>

Exercise at home for older people during COVID-19 outbreak

<https://www.moveitorloseit.co.uk/coronavirus-support-for-older-people-exercise-at-home/>

## **Sleep**

NHS every Mind Matters:

[www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mins-matters/sleep](http://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mins-matters/sleep)

‘How to conserve your energy’ guide

[www.rcot.co.uk/conserving-energy](http://www.rcot.co.uk/conserving-energy)

## **Mental Health:**

Anxiety UK 03444 775 774

[www.anxietyuk.org.uk](http://www.anxietyuk.org.uk)

Mental health foundation

[www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)

## **Tell us what you think of this leaflet**

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:

Jenny Olivey

Advanced Clinical Specialist Physiotherapist

York Hospital

Tel: 01904 725528

Email: [Jenny.olivey@york.nhs.uk](mailto:Jenny.olivey@york.nhs.uk)

## **Teaching, training and research**

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

## **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email [pals@york.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@york.nhs.uk).

An answer phone is available out of hours.



# Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

Please telephone or email if you require this information in a different language or format, for example Braille, large print or audio.

如果你要求本資 不同的 或 式提供 , 電  
或發電

Jeżeli niniejsze informacje potrzebne są w innym języku lub formacie, należy zadzwonić lub wysłać wiadomość e-mail

Bu bilgileri değişik bir lisanda ya da formatta istiyorsanız lütfen telefon ediniz ya da e-posta gönderiniz

Telephone: 01904 725566

Email: [access@york.nhs.uk](mailto:access@york.nhs.uk)

Owner	Jenny Olivey, Advanced Clinical Specialist Physiotherapist
Date first issued	August 2020
Review Date	August 2023
Version	1 (reissued August 2021)
Approved by	Anne Hallam, Physio Professional Lead, Ruth Ferguson OT Professional Lead
Document Reference	PIL 1463 v1.2

© 2021 York and Scarborough Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.  
All Rights reserved.