

# COVID-19 Recovery and Rehabilitation

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## What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is the name of the infection caused by the novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2. COVID-19 causes a raised temperature, a sore throat, a cough (or more coughing than usual), a loss of sense of taste and smell and an increase in shortness of breath. It spreads from droplets from the nose or mouth when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

## How does it affect your breathing?

- The virus sits in the throat causing inflammation and making you cough
- It affects the lungs, causing pneumonia, and leading to shortness of breath
- In severe cases, it can damage the lining of the lungs, causing them to fill with fluid. This may cause severe difficulty in breathing and you may need to be monitored at home, taken into a hospital and, in some cases, you may require breathing support from a ventilator

## What is the normal recovery pattern?

The recovery time is different for everyone but for many people symptoms will resolve by 12 weeks.

For most people who have had the COVID infection and are severe enough to need hospital care, we would expect from experience with other similar bacterial and viral infections that in around

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

Those of you who were admitted into intensive care will often find that recovery takes longer than this, possibly up to a year.

The likelihood of developing Long COVID is not thought to be linked to the severity of your initial illness including whether you were in hospital or not. If new or ongoing symptoms occur, they can change unpredictably, affecting you in different ways at different times and no two people will have the same

experience. However, some common effects of COVID-19 are discussed in this booklet.

This booklet is a general guide and contains simple treatment techniques to support your recovery.

## Common ongoing symptoms

The most commonly reported symptoms include (but are not limited to):

- Respiratory symptoms (breathlessness, cough)
- Cardiovascular symptoms (chest tightness, chest pain, palpitations)
- Generalised symptoms (fatigue, fever, pain)
- Neurological symptoms (cognitive impairment such as 'brain fog', loss of concentration or memory issues, headache, sleep disturbance, pins and needles and numbness, dizziness, delirium in older people)
- Gastrointestinal symptoms (abdominal pain, nausea, diarrhoea, anorexia and reduced appetite in older people)
- Musculoskeletal symptoms (joint and/or muscle pain)
- Psychological/psychiatric symptoms (symptoms of depression or anxiety)
- Ear, nose and throat symptoms (tinnitus, earache, sore throat, dizziness, loss of taste and/or smell)
- Dermatological (skin rashes)

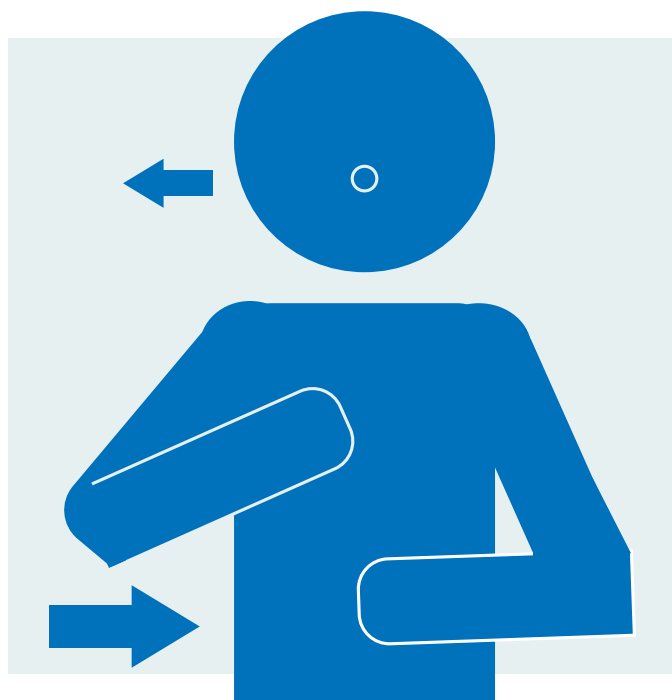
## Breathlessness

This is a common symptom for many people with COVID-19. Being short of breath can make you feel anxious and frightened and make it harder to do your day to day tasks. It is important to realise that being breathless when moving around is a normal part of recovery and you should not avoid doing things that make you breathless. Instead you should use some of the techniques in this booklet to help you manage and take control of your breathing, so you are able to take steps towards getting back to normal. As time goes on, you'll find you are able to do more and your stamina will increase.

These techniques may help you to bring your shortness of breath under control. Try them out and see which ones work for you. If any of these techniques cause unwanted symptoms such as dizziness please no longer use them. If your breathing is not improving as you think it should or you feel it is getting worse please seek help from medical professionals.

## Breathing control

- The aim is to move from fast, upper chest breathing to relaxed, slow tummy breathing
- Place one hand gently on the stomach. You should feel your stomach rise and fall with each breath in and out
- Take slower breaths; in through your nose down into your tummy, then gently breathe out through pursed lips to create more room for the next breath in. Do not force your lungs to empty



## Breathlessness scale

Use this scale to monitor your breathlessness. Aim for level 4-5.

My number	My face	My thoughts	My body
1		This exercise is the same as resting.	I am getting ready to exercise but I don't feel different yet.
2		This exercise isn't hard.	I am getting a little hot. I can still talk normally.
3		I am just beginning to feel like I am exercising.	I am feeling like my body is warming up.
4		I am starting to feel like I am exercising. I feel good!	I can almost talk in a regular voice, but it's getting harder!
5		This exercise is a good workout! I am really working hard.	My cheeks are getting pink. I am getting a little sweaty.
6		I am exercising more than I thought. It is getting harder to do.	I feel like talking is getting harder – I have to stop sometimes for air.
7		This is pretty hard. I can exercise a little bit longer, then I'll stop.	I am getting really sweaty. My body is hot!
8		This exercise is really hard, but I'm not ready to quit.	I can talk a little, but not too much.
9		I need a break from this very, very hard exercise!	My face looks red. I feel like I need to stop.
10		I'm exercising too much! My body is making me stop now!	My heart is beating very fast and strong. I can't talk.

## Positions of ease

The following positions support the muscles in the body that help with breathing. When in these positions, relax your neck, jaw, shoulders, wrists and hands.



## Conscious Proning

These instructions are for patients who have been advised to undertake 'Conscious Proning' in the early stages of the infection.

Please try to not spend a lot of time lying flat on your back. Lying on your stomach and in different positions will help your body to get air into all areas of your lungs. It is recommended to change your position every 30 minutes to two hours rotating as opposite. Please note sitting up is better than lying on your back:

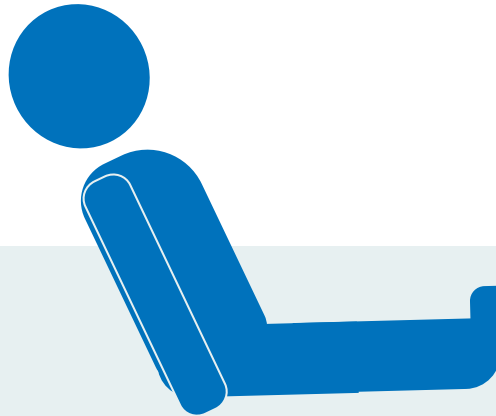




1. 30 minutes – 2 hours: lying fully prone on your stomach (bed flat)



2. 30 minutes – 2 hours: lying on your right side (bed flat)



3. 30 minutes – 2 hours: sitting up (30-60 degrees) by adjusting head of the bed



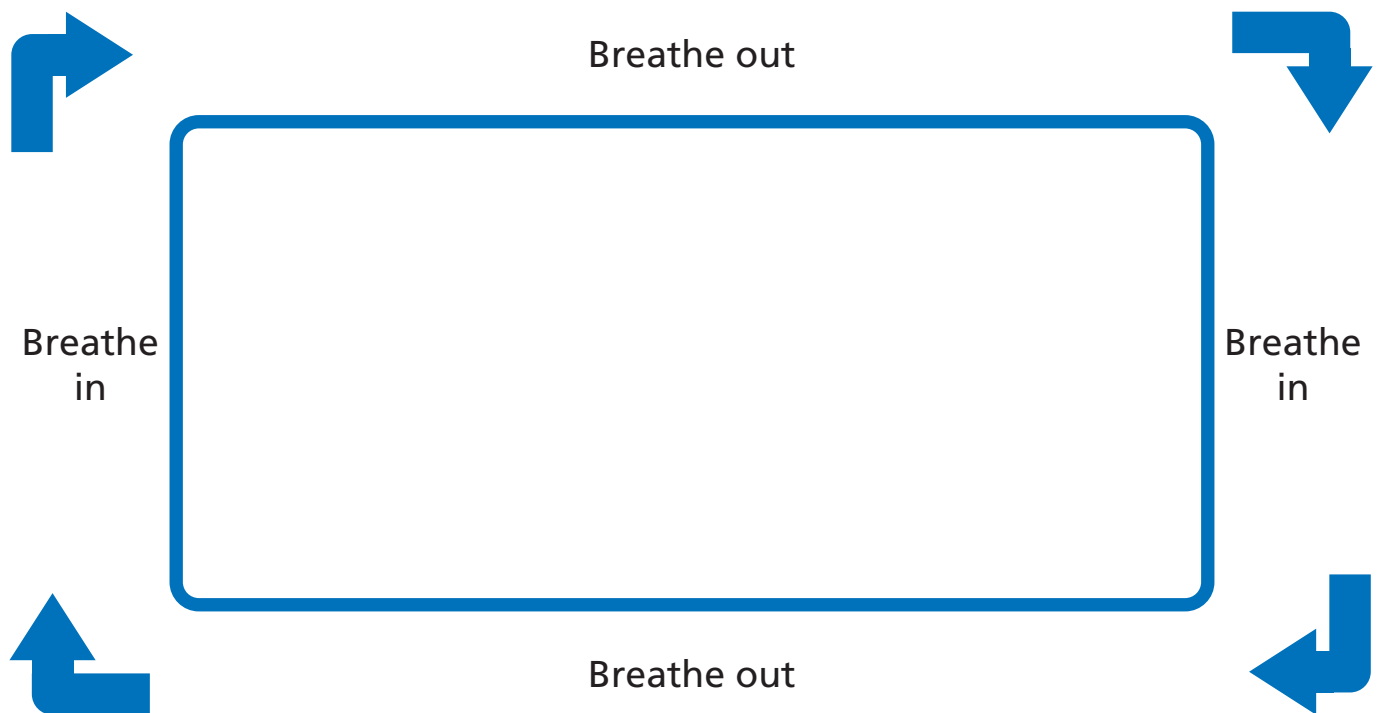
4. 30 minutes – 2 hours: lying on your left side (bed flat)



5. Back to position 1 and continue to repeat the cycle

## Rectangular breathing

- Get into a comfortable position where your arms and shoulders are relaxed.
- Close your mouth, and breathe in and out through your nose, make sure your nose is clear.
- Look at a rectangular object, for example a window or TV screen.
- Trace the outline of the rectangle as you breathe, ensuring your breath out is longer and slower than your breath in.



## Being mobile

The effects of COVID-19 on your body and of moving around less than normal while in hospital is likely to result in you feeling weaker. The timeline to recover from COVID-19 is still unknown. You should return to exercising as you feel able gradually, using the breathlessness and energy conservation techniques discussed in this leaflet.

If you feel too tired or short of breath, rest and return to these exercises at a later date or try to do them in smaller 'bite-sized' chunks.

## Setting goals for recovery

It is important to be patient and stay positive! Setting realistic goals can help you feel a sense of achievement and to see your progress.

When setting goals for your rehabilitation it is important to split your goals into smaller, more manageable goals. Try and relate your smaller goals to more routine day to day functions, and relate longer term goals to hobbies and more strenuous activities.

Your goals can be physical and/or psychological, reflecting back on your journey will help guide this. Members of our therapy team can also support and give advice.

## Pacing

Pacing is a planned approach to managing your energy levels. It is about breaking activities down into smaller, more manageable chunks.

By doing this, you can avoid boom and bust patterns of behaviour. Over time, your energy levels will increase, and fatigue will be more manageable.

Think about your energy levels like a battery: certain activities will deplete it and others will charge it. For example, a short walk will deplete it, a rest will recharge it. If we deplete the battery too much, it will take a much longer time to recharge.

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

Try NOT to compare yourself to others – your energy levels are specific to you.

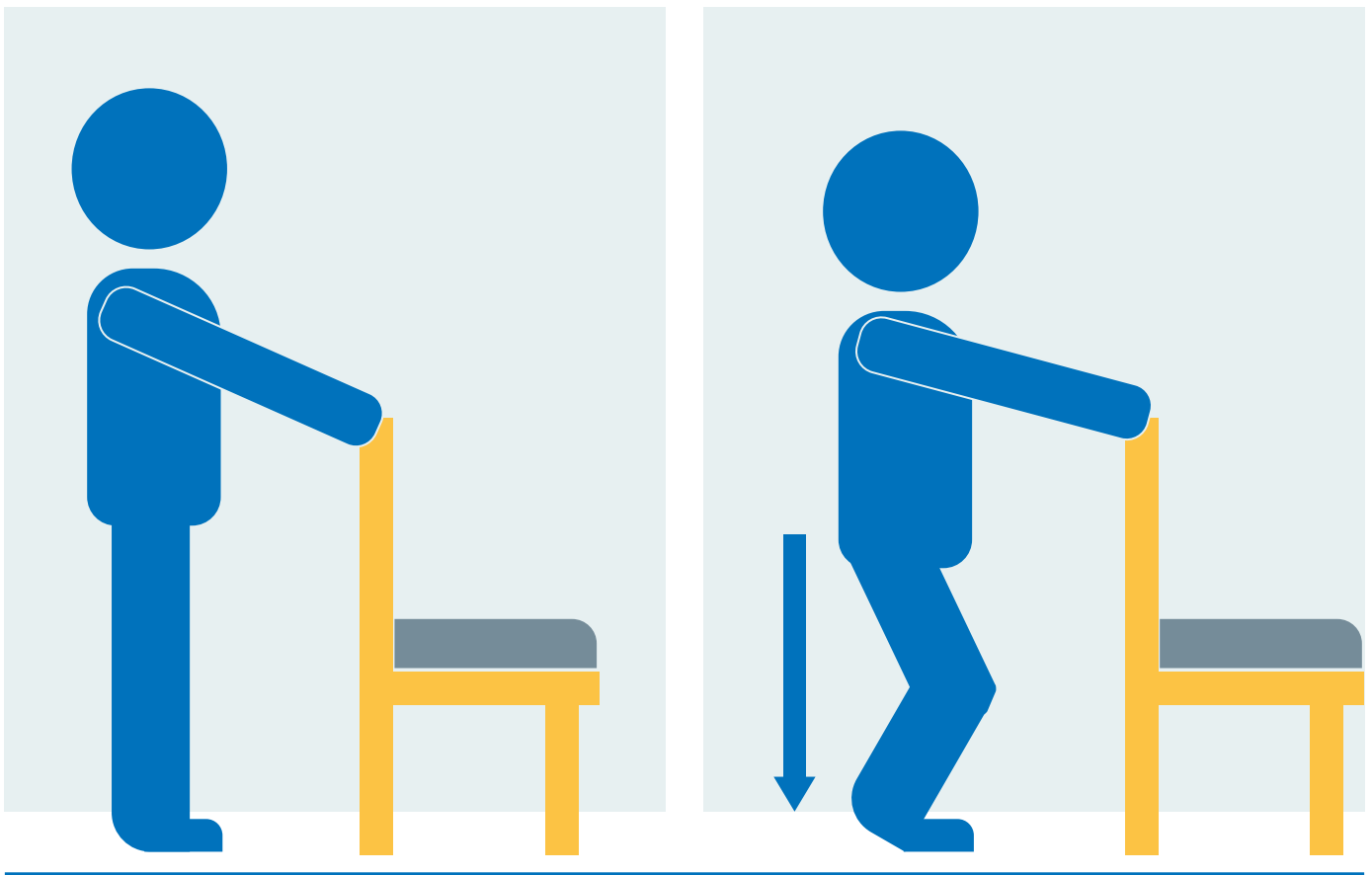
## Exercises

Complete the following exercises at your own pace, maintain mindfulness of your breathing.

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### 1. Half squat

- Stand with your feet shoulder width apart, hold onto a secure object
- Slowly bend your knees, keep your back upright, and stand up straight again



#### Progression

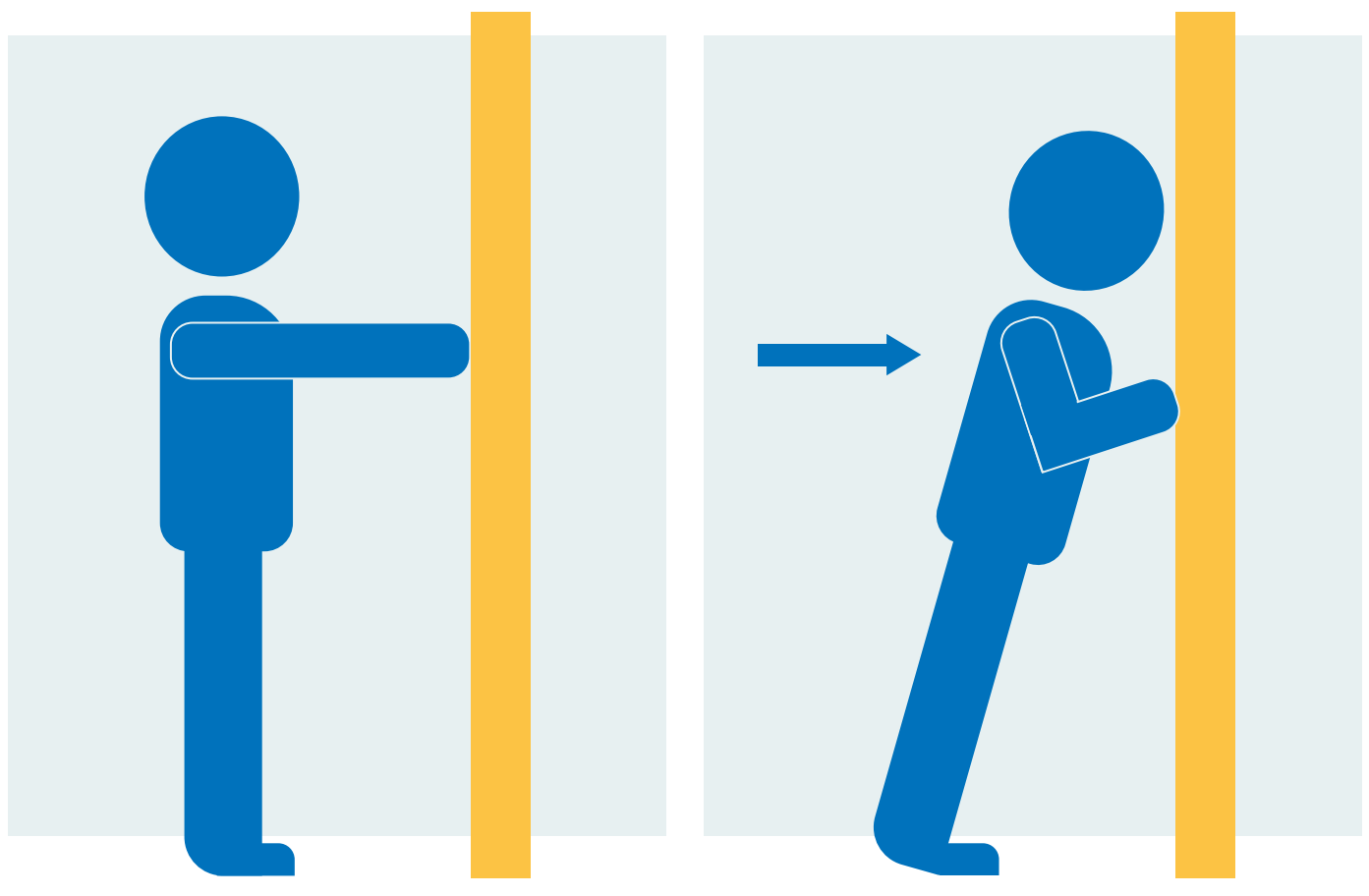
- Full squat
- Squat holding weights
- Increase number of repetitions

#### Alternative

- Lunges
- Sit to stand (not using arms)

## 2. Standing press-up

- Facing a wall, stand at arm's length away from the wall with feet shoulder width apart
- Place your hands on the wall at shoulder height with your palms flat
- Keep your feet still and slowly bend your elbows bringing your nose to the wall
- Straighten your arms so you are pushing your body weight back from the wall

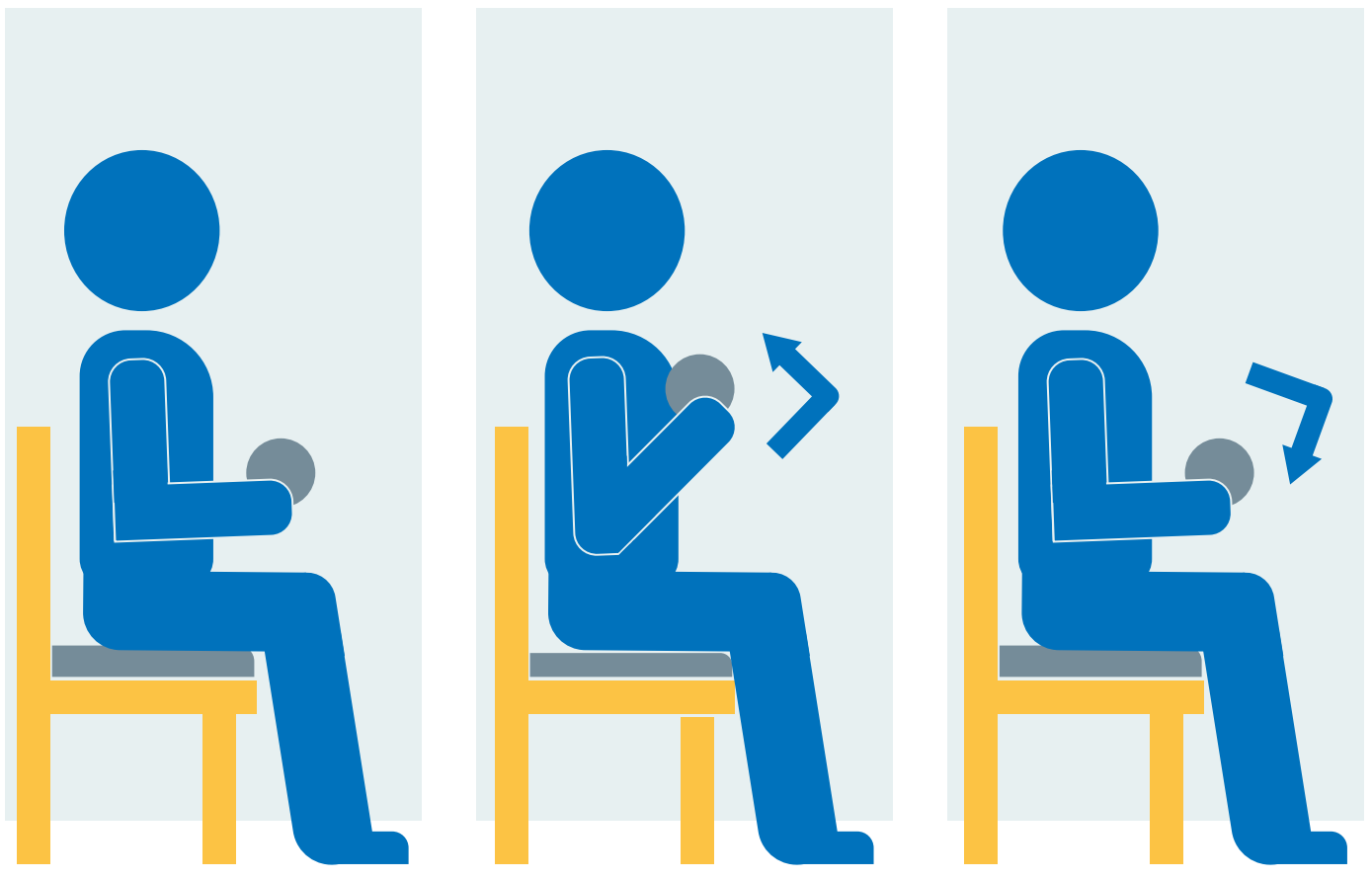


### Progression

- Use lower surface such as a solid table/work surface
- Increase number of repetitions

### 3. Bicep curls

- Sitting with your back supported and a weight in your hand
- Slowly bend your right elbow, lifting the weight towards your right shoulder
- Slowly lower the weight again



#### Progression

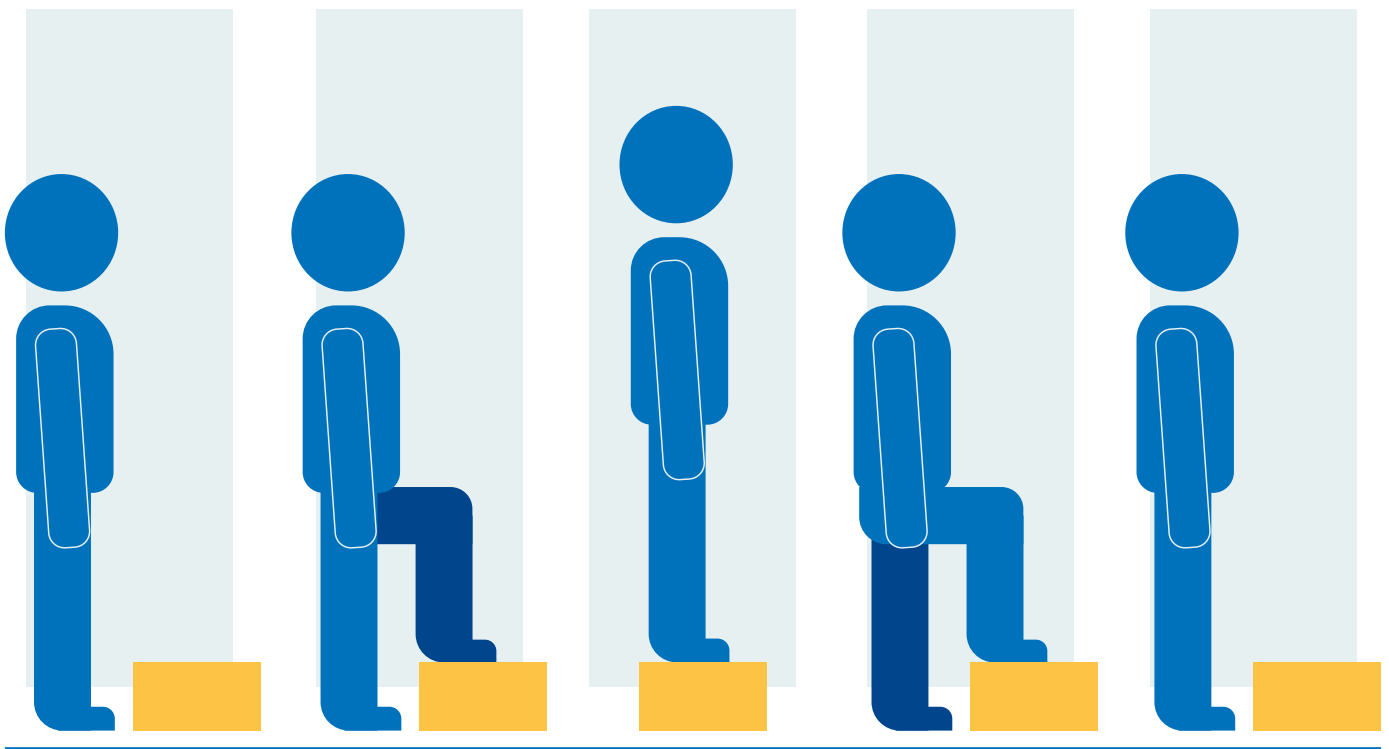
- Increase weight and/ or repetitions
- Stand up to perform exercise

Milk bottle weights filled with water, for reference:

- 1 pint = 0.6kg
- 2 pints = 1.2kg
- 4 pints = 2.5kg
- 6 pints = 3.6kg

## 4. Step-ups

- Stand in front of a step
- Step up and down with either leg leading
- You should change over to your lead leg halfway through your exercise.



## Progression

- Increase the speed of stepping
- Increase the time spent stepping
- Carry light weights in your hands

## Progression of exercise and function as you recover from COVID-19

- As you get better and feel stronger, it is important that you increase the time you spend exercising every day.
- Plan ahead and spread your tasks throughout the week rather than doing them all in one day. Try to avoid having two busy days together.
- Alongside the above exercises, please increase your cardiovascular exercises daily- by walking, or doing any activity which raises your heart rate.
- Please keep in line with government guidelines regarding social distancing and social isolation at this time.



## Psychological impact of illness

Being physically unwell can often affect your psychological well-being whilst in hospital and at home.

Experiencing symptoms of anxiety and low mood whilst you are unwell in hospital is common and a very normal reaction to a difficult and scary situation. For many people, these symptoms start to improve alongside your physical recovery in the weeks and months after being discharged from hospital.

There are many things you can do to help yourself feel better. However if your feelings don't improve, and you are struggling, then there are many places that you can seek help from.

## Anxiety

Anxiety can be described as a feeling of unease, worry or fear. It can have both psychological and physical symptoms which can range from mild to more severe.

Common signs of anxiety include:

- Difficulty sleeping
- Difficulty thinking, concentrating or making decisions
- Being irritable
- Feeling on-edge or not being able to relax
- Feeling tearful
- Palpitations
- Nausea or 'butterflies'
- Loss of appetite

## Depression and low mood

Low mood or depression can cause feelings of sadness and loss of interest in the activities you once enjoyed. Depression symptoms can range from mild to more severe and can be more difficult to identify.

Common symptoms include:

- Feeling sad more often
- Loss of energy or increased fatigue
- Becoming more withdrawn from daily life
- Feeling worthless or guilty
- Difficulty thinking, concentrating or making decisions
- Changes in appetite

If you find that you continue to feel low, anxious, or worried when in hospital or once you get home please get in touch with the therapy team and we can advise on further support services.

Steps to Wellbeing are a local Dorset-wide service that offer free and confidential psychological treatments for depression, anxiety problems, worry and stress.

To find out more or self-refer, see [www.steps2wellbeing.co.uk](http://www.steps2wellbeing.co.uk) or discuss with your health care worker or GP. All appointments are currently offered via telephone or video call.

## **Apps supporting self-care and managing anxiety**

- Wysa – stress, sleep and mindfulness therapy chat bot
- Fabulous – self-care
- Headspace – everyday mindfulness and meditation

Our Dorset, the group of NHS providers and local councils, has launched an app library that contains hundreds of evaluated and proven health apps. Find out more and browse the library at [www.ourdorset.nhs.uk/apps](http://www.ourdorset.nhs.uk/apps).

For checking symptoms from home and requesting input from your primary care team please download the NHS App and go to **check your symptoms / ask your GP for advice** to submit an online request.

## Nutrition

Following illness you need to have extra protein and calories to increase your strength and repair muscle. This is especially important if you have lost weight and/or have a poor appetite. Visit [www.malnutritionpathway.co.uk/covid19](http://www.malnutritionpathway.co.uk/covid19) to access information about managing nutrition.

It is not known if over-the-counter vitamins and supplements are helpful, harmful or have no effect in the treatment of new or ongoing symptoms of COVID-19.”

## Discharge home following a hospital admission

If you required admitting to the hospital because your infection was so bad, you may be seen at home by members of the multidisciplinary team (MDT). Members of this team will often include doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and social workers who have been taking care of you during your recovery.

The support that you will require when you are discharged will vary depending on many factors, including your personal circumstances, illness and length of hospital stay.

Once you have been discharged from hospital your recovery will be well underway, however many patients will have further to go before they make improvements. Some may find the first few weeks a bit of an emotional roller-coaster in terms of readjusting to everyday life, and being without constant clinical care and support.

Find out more about recovery at home at [www.bit.ly/recoveryathome](http://www.bit.ly/recoveryathome).

## Supporting your recovery after COVID-19

As you find yourself recovering from COVID-19 you may still be coming to terms with the impact the virus has had on both your body and mind. These changes should get better over time – some may take longer than others, but there are things you can do to help.

The Your COVID Recovery website helps you to understand what has happened and what you might expect as part of your recovery. Find out more at [www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk](http://www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk).

## When do I need to seek help?

Most symptoms are common and usually get better over time; however if you are worried that you are not getting better as quickly as you would expect (you will find some further information on the Your COVID Recovery website [www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk](http://www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk)) it is worth discussing with a health care professional (contact the hospital team if they have provided you with a number, or your family GP practice for further advice). You may require examination or further tests for your ongoing symptoms.

Some of the medicines used to treat COVID can cause symptoms such as muscle aches, tiredness, feeling anxious or cough.

Please do not feel that you are wasting NHS time, we want to help you to get better as quickly as possible especially if you develop new or worsening symptoms.

It is worth remembering that not all the problems you will get afterwards will be caused by COVID.

Symptoms that are steady, not particularly worsening and are ongoing, are often best discussed with the clinician who knows you and your medical history and situation best. They will be in a more informed situation to steer you on the right path to recovery.

If you are concerned regarding your recovery, or need further guidance, please contact your GP, or go to the NHS 111 online service at [111.nhs.uk](http://111.nhs.uk) (or call 111 if unable to get help online).

## Long-term symptoms

If you are still experiencing symptoms related to your COVID infection for more than 12 weeks after the initial illness, your GP may refer you to the Dorset Post COVID Syndrome clinic for further assessment and guidance on ongoing appropriate support.

## Helpful links

- **Supporting your recovery**  
[www.covidpatientsupport.lthtr.nhs.uk](http://www.covidpatientsupport.lthtr.nhs.uk)  
A comprehensive guide with information to help with all aspects of your recovery including information on managing fatigue, breathlessness, swallowing, appetite, and nutrition. Lancashire teaching hospital.
- **Every mind matters**  
[www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters](http://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters)  
Tips to help if you are worried about coronavirus.
- **British Lung Foundation**  
[www.blf.org.uk](http://www.blf.org.uk)  
What you need to know about COVID-19 if you live with a lung condition.
- **Gov UK**  
[www.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.gov.uk/coronavirus)  
Up-to-date advice public safety restrictions and advice.
- **Managing breathlessness**  
[www.bit.ly/3bJttrt](http://www.bit.ly/3bJttrt)  
A leaflet on coping with breathlessness and positions that may help with breathing.
- **Energy conservation**  
[www.bit.ly/39s2sa8](http://www.bit.ly/39s2sa8)  
A leaflet on finding ways to conserve energy whilst experiencing or recovering from lung conditions.
- **www.rcot.co.uk/conserving-energy**  
Practical advice for people during and after having COVID-19 from the Royal College of Occupational Therapists
- **British Laryngological Association website**  
[www.britishlaryngological.org](http://www.britishlaryngological.org)  
For people experiencing voice problems following their illness.
- **Connection**  
**0300 123 5440**  
A 24/7 helpline for all ages for people struggling to cope or in a mental health crisis.
- **Home First: Discharge from hospital and recovery at home**  
[www.bit.ly/recoveryathome](http://www.bit.ly/recoveryathome)  
A leaflet on hospital discharge and continued recovery at home.
- **Bourenmouth, Christchurch and Poole Council Adult Social Care Contact Centre**  
[www.mylifemycare.com](http://www.mylifemycare.com)  
[asc.contactcentre@bcpcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:asc.contactcentre@bcpcouncil.gov.uk)  
**01202 123654**  
Phone line open Monday-Thursday 8.30am to 5.15pm and Friday 8.30am to 4.30pm. For those who are deaf, have hearing loss or who are speech impaired, the textphone number is: **07747 757570.**



**If you would like this document in an audio, large text or an easy read format, please call 01202 541946 or email [communications@dorsetccg.nhs.uk](mailto:communications@dorsetccg.nhs.uk)**

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