

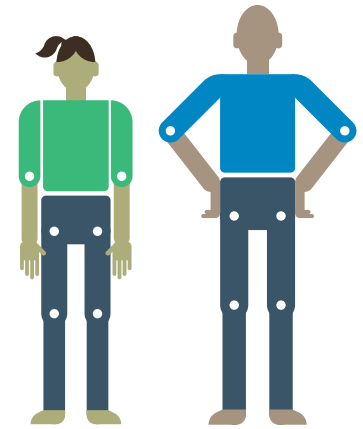


**World Health  
Organization**

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR **Europe**

# Support for rehabilitation: self-management after COVID-19-related illness

second edition



---

**Name:**

---

**Onset of COVID-19 symptoms (date):**

---

**Date this leaflet was given:**

---

**Name and contact details of health care  
professional providing leaflet:**

---

**Name and contact details of  
local health care services:**

---

**Name and contact details of  
rehabilitation support services:**

---

# Who is this leaflet for?

This leaflet provides support and advice for adults who are recovering from COVID-19. It can be used by individuals after hospitalization from the illness and those in the community who did not need hospitalization. The leaflet can complement care received from health care professionals.

This is the second edition of the leaflet that was originally published mid 2020 that includes updates to sections and new topics, encompassing what we have learnt about the condition and recovery in the last year.

The leaflet was written by rehabilitation professionals in consultation with people recovering from COVID-19. Although references are not shown for ease of reading, the advice is evidence-based. There is still much we don't know about post-COVID-19 recovery, and evidence is fast emerging.

COVID-19 can cause long-term health problems and symptoms that interfere with daily activities. In some cases, these can persist beyond 12 weeks, now referred to as post-COVID-19 conditions, also known as long COVID, or post-COVID-19 syndrome. Symptoms generally improve with time and this leaflet provides some practical suggestions to self-manage these common symptoms. If symptoms are worsening or not improving with time, review by a health care professional is needed.

You might want to read this leaflet in small stages, starting with the sections that relate to the symptoms for which you would like the most help.

Additionally, health care professionals can make suggestions to tailor the advice in this leaflet for you. The advice in the leaflet should not replace any individualized rehabilitation programme or any advice you may have been given by your health care professionals.

Your family and friends can help support you as you recover, and it may be helpful to share this leaflet with them.

## This leaflet provides information on the following areas.

	"Red flags" needing urgent attention from health care professionals	4
	Managing breathlessness	5
	Physical activity and exercise	8
	Energy conservation and fatigue management	14
	Managing problems with your voice	16
	Managing swallowing problems	17
	Nutrition, including smell and taste problems	18
	Managing problems with attention, memory, and thinking clearly	19
	Managing stress, anxiety, depression and sleep problems	20
	Managing pain	22
	Returning to work	23
	Symptom tracking diary	24



## **“Red flags” needing urgent attention from health care professionals**

There are certain medical complications that can arise while recovering from COVID-19 that need an urgent medical review. It’s important to contact a health care professional if you experience any “red flag” symptoms:

- you become very short of breath with minimal activity that does not improve with any of the positions for easing breathlessness described on page 5;
- there is a change in how breathless you are at rest that does not get better by using the breathing control techniques described on page 7;
- you experience chest pain, racing of the heartbeat or dizziness in certain positions or during exercise or activity;
- your confusion is getting worse or you have difficulty speaking or understanding speech;
- you have new weakness in your face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body; and/or
- your anxiety or mood worsens, or you have thoughts of harming yourself.

If you experience other symptoms that are concerning, you should seek the attention of a health care professional.



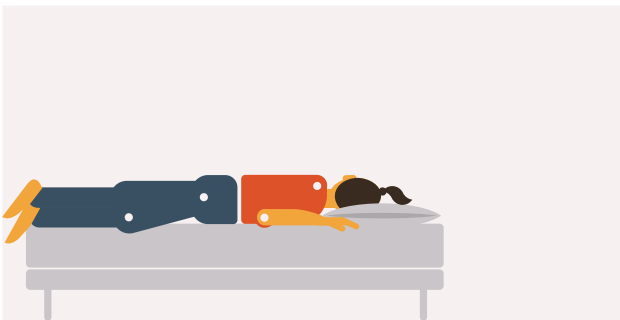
# Managing breathlessness

It's common to experience breathlessness after being ill from COVID-19. Losing strength and fitness while you were unwell, and the illness itself, can mean you become breathless easily. Feeling breathless can make you feel anxious, which can make breathlessness worse. Staying calm and learning the best way to manage your breathlessness will help.

Remember, it's normal to become more breathless when exerting yourself, such as walking up a flight of stairs, but it should recover to a level whereby you're not thinking about your breathing within a few minutes of rest. Your breathlessness should improve as you gradually recover or increase your activities, but in the meantime, the positions and techniques below can also help to manage it.

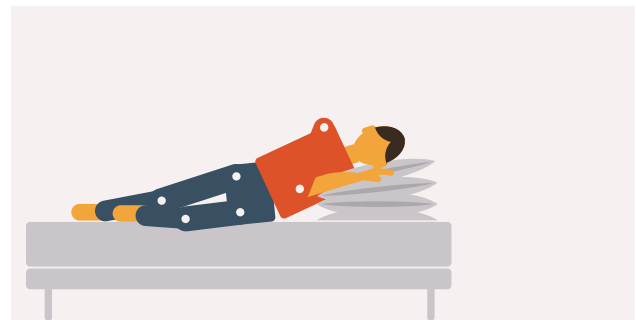
## Positions to ease breathlessness

These are some positions that may reduce your breathlessness. Try each of them to see which one(s) help you. You can also try the breathing techniques described below while in any of these positions to help ease your breathing.



### Lying prone

Lying flat on your stomach, or prone, can help breathlessness. It's not comfortable for everyone, but is a position to consider.



### High side lying

Lying on your side propped up by pillows, supporting your head and neck, with your knees slightly bent.



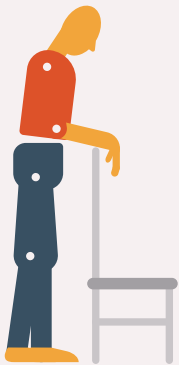
### **Forward lean sitting**

Sit at a table, lean forward from the waist with your head and neck resting on the pillow and your arms resting on the table. You can also try this without the pillows and rest your head on your hands.



### **Forward lean sitting (no table in front)**

Sit on a chair, lean forward to rest your arms on your lap or the armrests of the chair.



### **Forward lean standing**

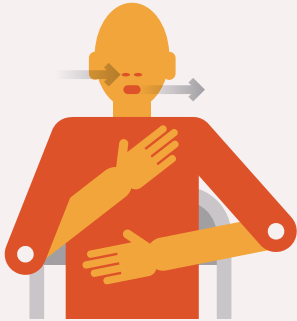
While standing, lean forward onto a windowsill or other stable surface.



### **Standing with back support**

Lean with your back against a wall and your hands by your side. Have your feet about 30 cm away from the wall and slightly apart.

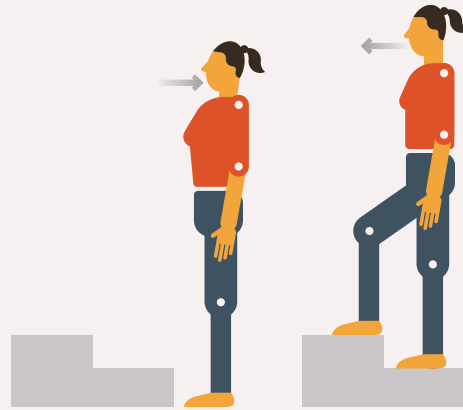
## Breathing techniques



### 1. Controlled breathing

This technique will help you to relax and control your breathing.

- Sit in a comfortable and supported position.
- Put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach.
- Only if it helps you to relax, close your eyes (otherwise leave them open) and focus on your breathing.
- Slowly breathe in through your nose (or mouth if you're unable to do this) and then out through your mouth.
- As you breathe, you'll feel the hand on your stomach rise more than the hand on your chest.
- Try to use as little effort as possible and make your breaths slow, relaxed and smooth.



### 2. Paced breathing

This is useful to practise when carrying out activities that might take more effort or make you breathless, like climbing the stairs or walking up a hill. It's important to remember that there is no need to rush, and you can take rests.

- Think about breaking the activity down into smaller parts to make it easier to carry out without getting so tired or breathless at the end.
- Breathe in before you make the effort of the activity, such as before you climb up a step.
- Breathe out while making the effort, such as climbing up a step.
- You may find it helpful to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.



## Physical activity and exercise

Spending time in hospital, or being ill at home with COVID-19 over a long period of time, can result in a significant reduction in your muscle strength and endurance. Exercise is important for regaining your muscle strength and endurance, BUT this needs to be safe and managed alongside other COVID-19 symptoms.

You might experience worsening of fatigue and other symptoms (described as “crashing” or “relapse”) after minimal exertion. This is described in scientific terms as “post-exertional malaise”, or PEM for short. The worsening typically is felt hours or days after physical or mental exertion. Recovery normally takes 24 hours or longer and can affect your energy levels, concentration, sleep and memory, and cause muscle/joint pains and flu-like symptoms.

If you experience PEM, you need to avoid exercise and activities that cause PEM and aim to conserve your energy. If you don't experience PEM, you can gradually increase your level of activity or exercise to improve your fitness levels. You could use the **Borg Rating of Perceived Exertion (RPE) Category Ratio CR-10 Scale (see next page)** as a rough guide to gradually increasing your activity level. This scale is a subjective assessment of how hard you feel you're working on a scale from 0 (no exertion at all) to 10 (maximum exertion).

The same activity will have different RPE scores in different people or at different times. For example, you may score slow walking as RPE 1 (extremely light) but this may be scored as 4 (somewhat hard) by another person, or by you on a different day. You can write down your daily activities and their RPE scores to monitor your condition and guide you on how you can increase your activity level.



Borg CR-10		Phases				
Score	Level of exertion	1	2	3	4	5
0	Rest/no exertion at all	1	2	3	4	5
1	Really easy/extremely light					
2	Easy/very light		2	3	4	5
3	Moderate/light					
4	Somewhat hard			3	4	5
5	Hard (heavy)					
6					4	5
7	Very hard					
8						5
9	Extremely hard					
10	Maximal exertion					

## Phases of exercise

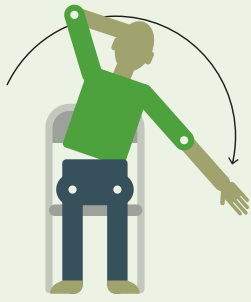
You should consider your return to exercise in five phases; the following sections describe these phases and give suggestions for activities. Stay at each phase for a minimum of seven days before progressing to the next. Drop back a phase if you find it difficult or experience setbacks in your symptoms. If you experience any “red flag” symptoms such as chest pain or dizziness, you should stop immediately and not restart your exercise programme until you have been seen by a health care professional.

### Phase 1.

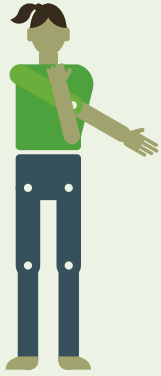
#### Preparation for return to exercise (your RPE score of 0–1)

Some examples: controlled breathing exercises (see page 3), gentle walking, stretching and balance exercises. If your RPE score for any of these is more than 1, do not do them in this phase.

Stretching your muscles can be done sitting or standing. Each stretch should be performed gently, and you should hold each one for 15–20 seconds.



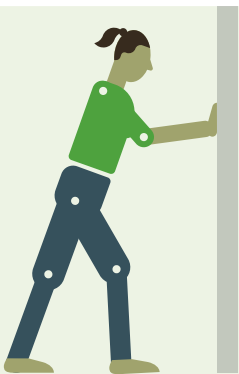
Reach your right arm up to the ceiling and then lean over to the left slightly; you should feel a stretch along the right side of your body. Repeat on the other side.



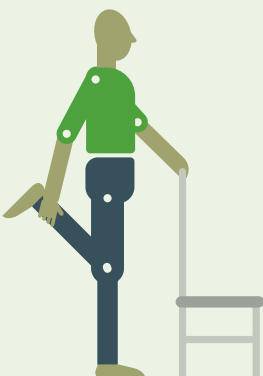
Put your arm out in front of you. Keeping your arm straight, bring it across your body at shoulder height, using your other hand to squeeze your arm to your chest so you feel a stretch around your shoulder. Repeat on the opposite side.



Sit on the edge of a chair with your leg out straight in front of you with your heel resting on the ground. Place your hands on your other thigh as support. Sitting as tall as you can, bend slightly forward at your hips until you can feel a slight stretch down the back of the leg that is stretched out. Repeat on the opposite side.



Stand with your feet apart, lean forward onto a wall and step one leg behind you. Bend your front knee, keeping your back leg straight and your heel on the floor. You should feel a stretch in the back of your lower leg. Repeat on the opposite side.



Stand up and hold onto something sturdy for support. Bend one leg up behind you, using the hand on the same side to hold your ankle or the back of your leg. Take your foot up towards your bottom until you feel a stretch along the front of your thigh. Repeat on the opposite side.

## Phase 2.

### Low-intensity activity (your RPE score of 2–3)

Examples: walking, light household/garden tasks. If your RPE score for any of these is more than 3, do not do them in this phase.

If you can tolerate RPE scores of 2–3, you can gradually increase the time spent in exercises by 10–15 minutes per day. You'll need to spend at least seven days in this phase without crashing (post-exertional malaise (PEM)) before progressing to the next level.

## Phase 3.

### Moderate-intensity activity (your RPE score of 4–5)

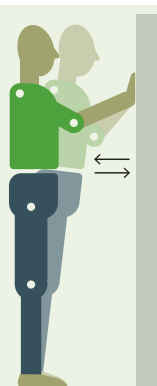
Examples: brisk walking, going up and down stairs, jogging, introducing inclines, resistance exercises. If your RPE score for any of these is more than 5, do not do them in this phase.

### Example of strengthening exercises for your ARMS



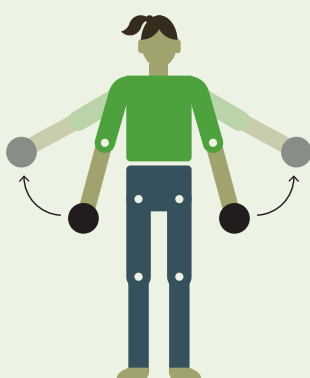
#### Bicep curl

With your arms by your side, hold a weight in each hand, such as a tin of food, with your palms facing upwards. Gently lift the lower part of both arms (bending at the elbows) bringing the weights up towards your shoulders, and slowly lower back down again. You can do this exercise sitting or standing.



#### Wall push off

Place your hands flat against a wall at shoulder height, with fingers facing upwards, and your feet about 30 cm away from the wall. Slowly lower your body towards the wall by bending your elbows, then gently push away from the wall again, until your arms are straight.



#### Arm raises to the side

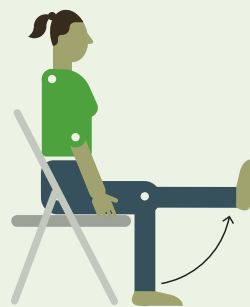
Hold a weight in each hand with your arms by your sides and your palms facing inwards towards your body. Raise both arms out to the side, up to your shoulder level (but not higher), and slowly lower back down.

## Example of strengthening exercises for your LEGS



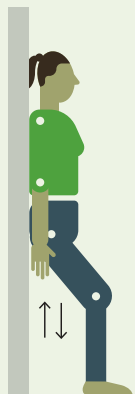
### Sit to stand

Sit in a chair with your feet a hip-width apart. With your arms by your side or crossed over your chest, slowly stand up, hold the position for the count of three, and slowly sit back down onto the chair.



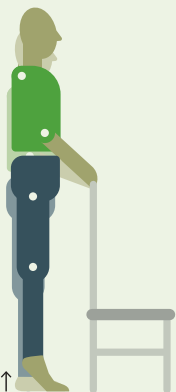
### Knee straightening

Sit in a chair with your feet together. Straighten one knee and hold your leg out straight for a moment, then slowly lower it. Repeat with your other leg. Increase the time holding your leg out straight to a count of three.



### Squats

Stand with your back against a wall or other stable surface and your feet slightly apart. Move your feet about 30 cm away from the wall. Keeping your back against the wall, or holding on to a chair, slowly bend your knees a short distance; your back will slide down the wall. Keep your hips higher than your knees. Pause for a moment before slowly straightening your knees again.



### Heel raises

Rest your hands on a stable surface (such as a chair) to support your balance, but do not lean on them. Slowly rise up on to your toes, and slowly lower back down again.

#### **Phase 4.**

#### **Moderate-intensity exercises with coordination and functioning skills (your RPE score of 5–7)**

Some examples: running, cycling, swimming and dance classes. If your RPE score for any of these exercises is more than 7, do not do them in this phase.

#### **Phase 5.**

#### **Return to your baseline exercises (your RPE score of 8–10)**

You're now able to complete your usual pre COVID-19 regular exercise/sports/activity regime.

**No exercise should be painful. If you experience pain, chest pain, or feel faint or dizzy during exercise, you should stop immediately and not restart your exercise programme until you have been seen by a health care professional.**



# Energy conservation and fatigue management

Fatigue is the most reported debilitating symptom experienced by those recovering from COVID-19. It is often described as an overwhelming sense of physical and mental tiredness.

**Physical fatigue:** you may find that when you're fatigued, your body feels overwhelmingly heavy and that even small movements take an enormous amount of energy.

**Mental and cognitive fatigue:** you may find that when you're fatigued, it becomes difficult to think, concentrate or take in new information and that your memory and learning are affected. Even basic word-finding and problem-solving might be difficult for you.

Fatigue may leave you feeling exhausted after completing your usual tasks, and you may wake up feeling as tired as when you went to sleep. Your fatigue levels may change from week to week, day to day or hour to hour. You may have little motivation to do anything because you're so tired and/or know that undertaking the smallest task will leave you exhausted. It can be difficult for you to explain the exhaustion to family, friends and colleagues.

Helping others to understand your fatigue and how it impacts you can make a big difference to how you cope with and manage your fatigue.

## Pacing

Pacing is a strategy that helps you to avoid crashing and to manage your activities without aggravating your symptoms. You should develop a flexible activity plan that allows you to stay within your current capabilities and avoid "overdoing things". Your levels of activity can then be increased in a controlled way over time as your energy levels and symptoms improve.

By pacing your activities, you ensure that:

- you're controlling the demands you place on yourself;
- you're ensuring these demands are in line with your current capabilities; and
- you're exposing your body and mind to these demands in a regular and controlled way to support your progressive recovery.

The first step is to think about how much activity you can manage now without risking crashing or relapse. It's important not to compare yourself to others or to how much you could do before. From this, you'll be able to set a baseline of activity. This is the amount of activity you can safely carry out every day.

## **Prioritize**

When your energy levels are low, you may need to make sure that the energy you use is spent on the activities that are most important to you. It may also be useful to identify what activities in your day are necessary – that is, which tasks “need” to be done and which you “want” to do, what activities could be carried out at a different time or day, and which activities somebody else could assist with.

## **Plan**

When planning your day or week, spread your activities out rather than trying to fit them all in one day, if possible. Think about when your energy levels may be at their best and complete your high-energy tasks at this time. Can an activity be graded so it doesn't have to be completed all at once? Can you, for instance, clean just one room rather than the whole house in one go?

As well as planning your activities, it's equally important to plan your rest and relaxation times to allow you to “recharge”. Plan rest periods as many times as needed throughout the day.

Creating an activity diary or a daily plan will help you to pace yourself and prioritize what you want and need to do. It may take a few attempts to get right, but once you feel you've found your right level, it's important to ensure a period of consistency before you increase your activity.



# Managing problems with your voice

## Problems with your voice

COVID-19 can cause a sore throat, irritable cough and a sensation of mucus pooling in the throat with the need to clear your throat regularly. You may have a weak, breathy or hoarse voice, particularly if you were ventilated (had a breathing tube) in hospital. You may feel that your throat/upper airway is more sensitive to the environment around you than before you were ill. For example, if you're exposed to a strong scent, it may trigger a cough, sensation of throat tightness or restriction of breathing. If your symptoms don't get better over time without treatment, please seek the opinion of a health care professional.

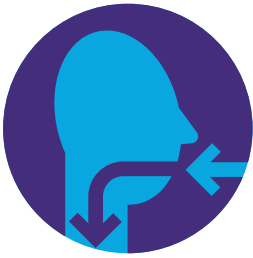
## Advice for problems with your voice

- Aim for good hydration. Sip water throughout the day to keep your voice working.
- Don't strain your voice. Don't whisper as this can strain your vocal cords. Try not to raise your voice or shout.
- Steam inhalation (covering your head with a towel and inhaling steam from a bowl of boiling water) for 10–15 minutes can help with dryness and moisturizes the vocal tract.
- Gastric reflux (sometimes called acid reflux or heartburn) is very common, so avoid eating late at night or eating foods that cause indigestion.
- Stop smoking.
- Use other ways of communicating, such as writing, texting or using gestures, if talking is difficult or uncomfortable.

## Advice for persistent cough

- Try breathing through your nose instead of your mouth.
- Try sucking on low-sugar boiled sweets.
- Try the "stop cough exercise". As soon as you feel the urge to cough, close your mouth and cover it with your hand (SMOTHER the cough). At the same time, make yourself SWALLOW. STOP breathing – take a pause. When you start to breathe again, breathe in and out through your nose SOFTLY.
- If you cough at night due to gastric reflux, try lying on your side or use pillows to prop yourself up.





## Managing swallowing problems

You may feel you have difficulties with swallowing foods and drink. This is because the muscles that help with swallowing may have become weak. For those who have been ventilated in hospital, the tube can cause some bruising and swelling of the throat and voice box. Paying attention to swallowing is important to avoid choking and lung infections. This can happen if food/drink “goes down the wrong way” and gets into your lungs.

If you have trouble swallowing, these techniques may help.

- **Sit upright whenever you eat or drink.** Never eat or drink while lying down.
- **Remain upright** (seated, standing, walking) for at least 30 minutes after meals.
- **Try foods of different consistencies** (thick and thin) to see if some foods are easier to swallow than others. It may help to choose soft, smooth and/or moist foods at first, or to chop up solid foods into very small pieces. Take your time while eating and don't rush.
- **Concentrate when you eat or drink.** Try to have your meals in a quiet place. Avoid talking while eating or drinking as this may open the airway and cause the food or drink to go down the wrong way.
- **Make sure your mouth is clear** before taking another bite or sip. If you need to, swallow again.
- **Eat smaller meals throughout the day** if you get tired when eating full meals.
- **If you cough or choke** when you eat and drink, seek advice from a health professional, as food or drink may be going down the wrong way into your lungs.
- **Keep your mouth clean** by brushing your teeth and staying hydrated.



# Nutrition, including smell and taste problems

COVID-19 can affect your appetite and weight in different ways. If you've spent time in hospital, you might have lost weight. On the other hand, you may have gained unwanted weight if you're struggling with post-COVID conditions and are less active than before. It's important to have good nutrition and hydration to support your body with recovery.

## **Eat a healthy and balanced diet**

A healthy diet includes the following:

- fruit, vegetables, legumes (such as lentils and beans), nuts and wholegrains (like unprocessed maize, millet, oats, wheat and brown rice);
- eat at least five portions (1 portion = 80 g) of a variety of fruit and vegetables every day and include vegetables in each meal;
- choose wholegrain foods, including wholegrain bread, rice and pasta;
- choose legumes such as beans, lentils and pulses, fish, eggs and lean meat as good sources of protein;
- have some dairy or dairy alternatives (such as soya products) every day;
- limit your intake of salt, fat and sugar:
  - salt intake should be less than 5 g per day – about one level teaspoon
  - sugar intake should be less than 50 g per day – about 12 level teaspoons
  - fat intake should be less than 30% of total energy intake – choose unsaturated fats found in fish, avocado, nuts and in vegetable oils rather than saturated and transfat; and
- drink plenty of water – aim for 6–8 glasses per day.

Additional information is available on the “Healthy diet” page of the WHO website (access at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/healthy-diet>).

## **Advice if you have reduced smell or taste**

- Ensure good oral hygiene with twice-daily toothbrushing.
- Perform smell training, which includes sniffing lemon, rose, clove and eucalyptus for 20 seconds each, twice a day.
- Experiment with herbs and spices like chilli, lemon juice and fresh herbs to add flavour to your foods, but be cautious as these can worsen gastric reflux.



## Managing problems with attention, memory, and thinking clearly

You can experience a range of difficulties with your thinking skills (referred to as “cognition”) while recovering from COVID-19. These difficulties can include problems with memory, attention, information processing, planning and organization. This is also referred to as “brain fog”. Brain fog is often made worse by fatigue, meaning the more tired you are, the more you notice increased difficulty with your thinking skills.

It’s important for you and your family to recognize if you’re experiencing these difficulties, as they can have an impact on your relationships, daily activities and your return to work or education. If you experience any of these difficulties, the strategies below may help.

- **Minimize distractions:** try to work in a quiet environment with no background distractions. You can use ear plugs if needed. If you’re distracted when reading text, block off parts of the text using paper, or use your finger as a marker.
- **Complete activities when less fatigued:** when completing a task that demands your thinking skills, plan this for a time when you’re less tired. For example, if you tire as the day goes on, do the task in the morning.
- **Take frequent breaks:** if the problem is made worse by fatigue, work for shorter periods of time and take breaks.
- **Set yourself reasonable targets or goals:** having something definite to work towards will help you stay motivated. Make sure you set realistic goals that are achievable – for example, reading just five pages of a book every day.
- **Have a schedule:** try to set up your daily/weekly schedule of tasks. It may help to plan activities ahead of time. Keeping a record, or breaking things down into manageable parts, can also help.
- **Use incentives:** when you achieve a target or goal, reward yourself – try something very simple, such as having a cup of tea or coffee, watching TV or going for a walk.
- **One thing at a time:** don’t rush or try to take in too much information at once, as this can lead to mistakes.
- **Aids:** using lists, notes, diaries and calendars can help support your memory and routine.
- **Brain exercises:** you could try new hobbies, puzzles, word and number games, memory exercises or reading to help with your thinking. Start with brain exercises that challenge you but are achievable and increase the difficulty as you are able. This is important for keeping you motivated.



# Managing stress, anxiety, depression and sleep problems

Being unwell with COVID-19 and having longer-term symptoms can be a stressful experience. Understandably, this can have an impact on your mood. It's not unusual to experience feelings of stress, anxiety (worry, fear) or depression (low mood, sadness). You may notice difficult thoughts or feelings related to your survival, particularly if you were very unwell. Your mood may be further affected by frustrations about not yet being able to return to your daily activities or work in the way you would like to.

## Relaxation

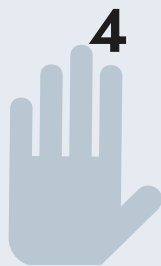
Relaxation helps save the limited energy you have while recovering from illness. It can help control your anxiety and improve your mood. Below is an example of a relaxation technique.

### Grounding technique

Take slow gentle breaths and ask yourself:



What are five things I can see?



What are four things I can feel?



What are three things I can hear?



What are two things I can smell?



What is one thing I can taste?

Think of the answers slowly to yourself, one sense at a time, and spend at least 10 seconds focusing on each one.

It's important to remember that your symptoms are a normal part of recovery following COVID-19. Worrying and thinking about your symptoms can often make them worse. For example, if you focus on headaches, you're likely to get more headaches.

Also, it's important to know that symptoms are often linked: an increase in one symptom leads to an increase in another symptom. If you're fatigued, your concentration will be affected, which in turn will affect your memory, which can then increase your anxiety and, consequently, your fatigue. As you can see, this can become a cycle. An improvement in one area therefore should lead to an improvement in another.

### **These are some simple things you can do to help.**

#### **– Get enough quality sleep:**

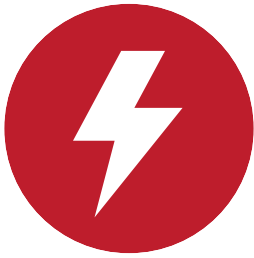
- have a regular routine of sleeping and waking time, using alarms if needed to remind you;
- you or your family/carers can try to ensure that your environment is free from things that might disturb you, such as too much light or noise;
- try to stop using electronic devices like phones and tablets an hour before bedtime;
- it would also help to minimize your intake of nicotine (such as from smoking), caffeine and alcohol; and
- try relaxation techniques to get to sleep.

#### **– Alternative relaxation techniques:** examples of relaxation techniques include meditation, mindfulness, guided imagery or visualization, baths, aromatherapy, Tai Chi, yoga and music.

#### **– Staying socially connected** is important for your mental well-being. Talking with others can help to reduce your stress and support you.

#### **– Healthy eating and gradually resuming your daily activities or hobbies** to the best of your ability will improve your mood.

The *Doing what matters in times of stress: an illustrated guide* booklet helps give you the practical skills you need to cope with your stress. You can access the guide at: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240003927>.

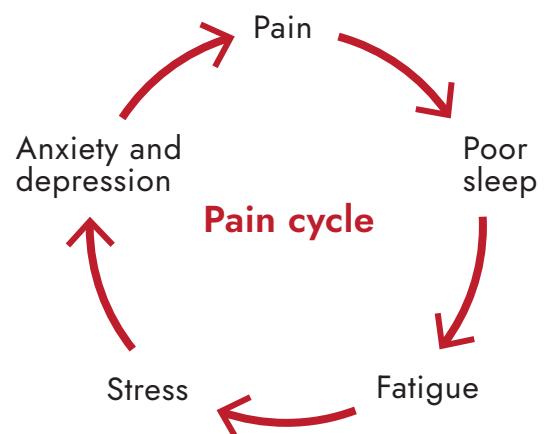


## Managing pain

Pain is a commonly reported symptom by people recovering from COVID-19. It can be in specific regions of the body (joint pain, muscle pain, headaches, chest pain and abdominal pain) or generalized and widespread. Persistent pain (lasting for more than three months) can be disabling and affects sleep, fatigue levels, mood and your ability to concentrate or work. If you experience specific pain symptoms, such as chest pain, that are aggravated by activity, you should consult a health-care professional.

### Advice on managing pain

- For joint, muscle or generalized pain, you can take non-prescription analgesics such as paracetamol or ibuprofen with food.
- Health care professionals can advise on medications that can help with pain that is not responding to over-the-counter analgesics.
- It can be difficult to completely eliminate persistent pain. Aim to make the pain manageable to allow you to function and sleep better, and to engage in essential daily activities.
- Sleeping well can help reduce pain symptoms. Timing the use of pain medications to coincide with sleep might be helpful if pain is interfering with your sleep.
- Listening to relaxing music or meditation can also help reduce pain levels.
- Pacing daily activities is one of the key tools for managing your pain. Gentle exercise also helps release the body's internal chemicals, called endorphins, which help reduce pain levels.
- Be reassured that pain is a common symptom and working through some pain is likely to help break the vicious cycle of pain. You can work through mild pain but don't exert yourself too much to the extent of worsening pain and fatigue levels (post-exertional malaise (PEM)).





## Returning to work

Returning to work can be challenging after COVID-19 and needs careful planning and management to ensure you're ready. Below are considerations for your return to work.

- Stay off work until you feel well enough.
- Communicate with your employer about your health status.
- If you feel fit to return to work, consult your health care professional and employer's occupational health service to obtain clearance to recommence duties.
- Review your work responsibilities and assess whether you would be able to do the full role or only part of the role.
- Discuss with your employer a return-to-work plan that involves a gradual increase in your duties over a period (otherwise called a "phased return to work") and is regularly reviewed. This can help prevent relapse and further absence. When you return, adjustments can be made to your work pattern, such as your start and finish times, working from home or taking up lighter tasks to begin with.
- Your employer should be supportive in this phased return to work process, which can take weeks or months depending on the nature of your symptoms and the nature of your work.
- If you're unable to meet the requirements of your role, you could consider a change of duties or redeployment.
- If you think your medical condition is likely to affect your work in the long term, consult your health care professional and employer so that necessary adjustments can be made based on national policies and legal requirements.

# Symptom tracking diary

Please indicate in the first column whether this is a new symptom since contracting the illness or an old symptom that you had before COVID-19.

In subsequent columns, score each symptom on a scale of **0–3 (0 not present, 1 slight or mild problem, 2 moderate problem, 3 severe or life disturbing)**.

Enter your scores once a week to show whether your symptoms are getting better or worse (relapse).

Symptoms	New symptom Yes/No	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date
	Score 0–3	Score 0–3	Score 0–3	Score 0–3	Score 0–3	Score 0–3	Score 0–3
Do you become <b>breathless</b> when walking up a flight of stairs or dressing yourself?							
Do you have any <b>cough/throat sensitivity/voice change</b> ?							
Do you have any change in sense of <b>smell or taste</b> ?							
Do you have any difficulty with <b>swallowing</b> liquids or solids?							
Do you feel <b>tired (fatigued)</b> during the day							
Do you experience <b>worsening of symptoms</b> 6–24 hours after physical or mental exertion?							
Do you have any <b>pain</b> (joint pain/muscular pain/headache/abdominal pain)?							
Do you get <b>palpitations</b> (racing of heartbeat) during movement or activity?							
Do you get <b>dizziness</b> during movement or activity?							
Do you have difficulties with your <b>sleep</b> ?							
Do you have problems with <b>cognition</b> (memory/concentration/planning)?							
Do you feel <b>anxious</b> ?							
Do you feel low or <b>depressed</b> ?							
Do you have any problems in <b>communication</b> (finding the right words)?							
Do you have problems with <b>mobility (moving about)</b> ?							
Do you have problems with doing <b>personal care activities</b> such as bathing or dressing?							
Do you have problems doing <b>other daily activities</b> such as housework or shopping?							
Do you have any problems with <b>caring</b> for family members or <b>interacting with friends</b> ?							
Other symptoms (insert) –							
Other symptoms (insert) –							
Other symptoms (insert) –							



## The WHO Regional Office for Europe

The World Health Organization (WHO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations created in 1948 with the primary responsibility for international health matters and public health. The WHO Regional Office for Europe is one of six regional offices throughout the world, each with its own programme geared to the particular health conditions of the countries it serves.

### Member States

Albania	Lithuania
Andorra	Luxembourg
Armenia	Malta
Austria	Monaco
Azerbaijan	Montenegro
Belarus	Netherlands
Belgium	North Macedonia
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Norway
Bulgaria	Poland
Croatia	Portugal
Cyprus	Republic of Moldova
Czechia	Romania
Denmark	Russian Federation
Estonia	San Marino
Finland	Serbia
France	Slovakia
Georgia	Slovenia
Germany	Spain
Greece	Sweden
Hungary	Switzerland
Iceland	Tajikistan
Ireland	Turkey
Israel	Turkmenistan
Italy	Ukraine
Kazakhstan	United Kingdom
Kyrgyzstan	Uzbekistan
Latvia	

### World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe

UN City, Marmorvej 51,  
DK-2100 Copenhagen Ø,  
Denmark

Tel.: +45 45 33 70 00

Fax: +45 45 33 70 01

Email: [eurocontact@who.int](mailto:eurocontact@who.int)

Website: [www.euro.who.int](http://www.euro.who.int)

© World Health Organization 2021.

Some rights reserved.

This work is available under the  
CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO license

Second edition

WHO/EURO:2021-855-40590-59892