

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



**Name:** .....

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

**Date this booklet was given:** .....

**Date of first COVID vaccination (please book on discharge four (4) weeks from recovery of acute symptoms or four (4) weeks from a positive COVID-19 result):** .....

**Booked date of second COVID-19 vaccination:** .....

**Name and contact details of health care professional providing booklet:** .....

.....

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

.....

## Who is this booklet for?

This booklet provides support and advice for adolescents and adults who are recovering from COVID-19. COVID-19 may cause long-term health problems and symptoms that could interfere with daily activities. In some cases, these can persist beyond 12 weeks, and is referred to as long COVID, or post-COVID-19 syndrome. Symptoms generally improve with time and this booklet provides some practical suggestions to self-manage these common symptoms. If symptoms are worsening or not improving with time, you should seek medical advice from your GP or the health care professional visiting you.

The advice in this booklet should not replace any individualised 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 booklet with them.

**We recommend that you consider enrolling for the Influenza (Flu) vaccine annually. Please contact your local healthcare provider.**

*Kindly acknowledging WHO Regional Office for Europe.*

*This translation was not created by the WHO Regional Office for Europe. WHO Regional Office for Europe is not responsible for the content or accuracy of this translation. The original English edition shall be the binding and authentic edition: Support for rehabilitation: self-management after COVID-19-related illness, second edition. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2021.*

## This booklet provides information on the following areas:

Symptoms needing urgent attention from health care professionals	4
Managing breathlessness	5
Energy conservation and fatigue management	7
Physical activity and exercise	8
Managing problems with your voice	13
Managing swallowing problems	14
Nutrition, including smell and taste problems	15
Managing problems with attention, memory, and thinking clearly	16
Managing stress, anxiety, depression and sleep problems	17
Managing pain	20
Returning to work	21
Symptom tracking diary	22

## Symptoms 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 of the following 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 6;
- 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.

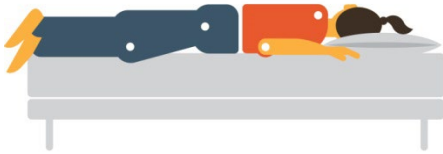
# Managing breathlessness

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



### 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 window sill 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.

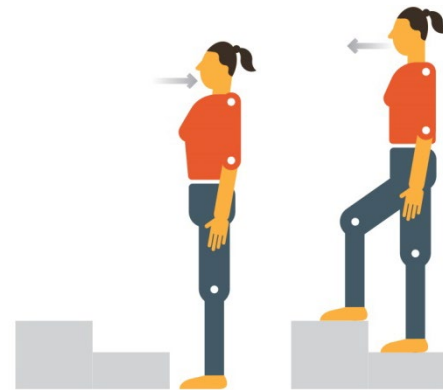
## Breathing techniques



### 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 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.

# 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. It is ok if some days you don't manage to achieve anything.

## 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.

## Prioritise

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 prioritise 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.



# 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** (below) 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	Really easy/extremely light					
2	Easy/very light					
3	Moderate/light					
4	Somewhat hard					
5	Hard (heavy)					
6						
7	Very hard					
8						
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)

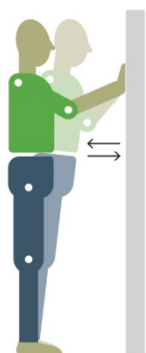
Examples: brisk walking, going up and down stairs, jogging, introducing inclines, resistance exercises. If your RPE score for any of these is more than 5, do not do them in this phase.

### Example of strengthening exercises for your ARMS



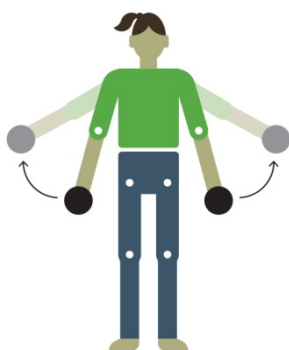
#### Bicep curl

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


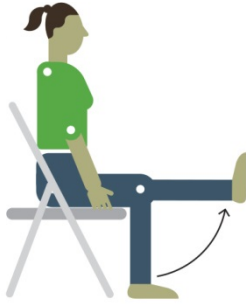

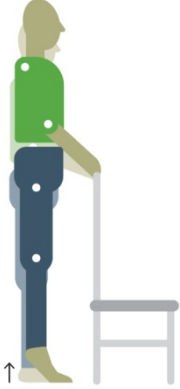
Place your hands flat against a wall at shoulder height, with fingers facing upwards, and your feet about 30 cm away from the wall. Slowly lower your body towards the wall by bending your elbows, then gently push away from the wall again, until your arms are straight.



#### 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

	<p><b>Sit to stand</b></p> <p>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.</p>
	<p><b>Knee straightening</b></p> <p>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.</p>
	<p><b>Squats</b></p> <p>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.</p>
	<p><b>Heel raises</b></p> <p>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.</p>

## 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.

**See you GP for a referral to Physiotherapy if you have any ongoing concerns.**

Useful link:

<https://www.csp.org.uk/news/coronavirus/clinical-guidance/long-covid>

# 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, 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.
- If you smoke, it is ideal if you stop as this will make difficulties with your voice worse. Free help to stop smoking is available via [www.smokefree.org.nz](http://www.smokefree.org.nz) or talk to your local health care provider.
- 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** 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.

Swallowing difficulties can cause food and drink to go down the wrong way - into the trachea (windpipe) and lungs instead of down to the stomach. This is known as '**aspiration.**' Aspiration may lead to **choking, chest infections** and **pneumonia**. Speech-language therapists specialise in supporting people who have difficulty with communication and/or swallowing.

**See you GP for a referral to a Speech Language therapist if you are regularly choking on food and/or drinks, or, if you are having swallowing difficulties and develop a chest infection**

## 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 wholegrain (like unprocessed maize, millet, oats, wheat and brown rice);
- eat at least five portions (1 portion = 1 handful or half a cup) of a variety of fruit and vegetables every day and try to include fruit or 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;
- Choose and prepare foods that are low in salt (sodium); if using salt, choose iodised salt.
- Choose and prepare foods with little or no added sugar.
- Choose unsaturated fats found in fish, avocado, nuts and in vegetable oils rather than saturated and transfat;
- drink plenty of water – aim for 8-10 glasses per day.
- Additional information is available from the Ministry of Health Website:  
[https://www.healthed.govt.nz/system/files/resource-files/HE1518\\_Healthy%20eating%2C%20active%20living.pdf](https://www.healthed.govt.nz/system/files/resource-files/HE1518_Healthy%20eating%2C%20active%20living.pdf)

### Advice if you have reduced smell or taste

- Ensure good oral hygiene with twice daily tooth brushing.
- 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.

**If you have ongoing concerns about your weight please see your GP for referral to a dietitian**



# 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 organisation. 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 recognise 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:**

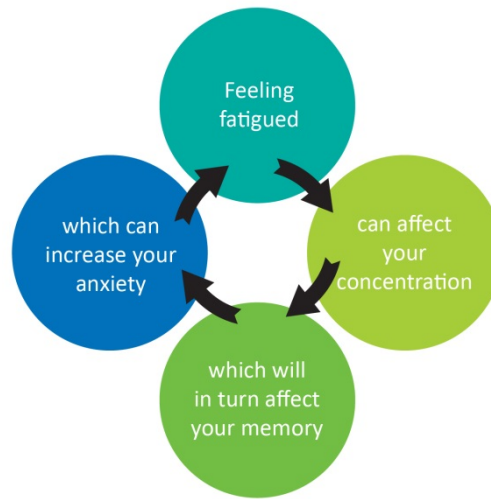


Think of the answers slowly to yourself, one sense at a time, and spend at least 10 seconds focusing on each one.

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. **The good news** is that an improvement in one area should lead to an improvement in another. These are normal and understandable and appropriate responses, below are some steps that you, your family, whānau and carer can do with you to get through it.

---

## 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 whānau, and 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 or limit the use of electronic devices like phones and tablets an hour before bedtime; turning on night mode feature in the evening
- it would also help to limit minimise your intake of nicotine (such as from smoking/vaping), caffeine and alcohol; and
- try relaxation techniques to get to sleep.

— **Alternative relaxation techniques:** examples of relaxation techniques include meditation, mindfulness, guided imagery or visualisation, baths, aromatherapy, Tai Chi, yoga and music. YouTube has free videos and free apps which can be downloaded for your phone. (Eg: Insistent timer)

— **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>.

Other resources available are:

**1. 1737 Counselling Support**

Phone/ Text: 1737

Website: [www.1737.org.nz](http://www.1737.org.nz)

Free call or text 1737 any time for support from a trained counsellor

**2. Lifeline**

Phone: 0800 543 354 (free, available 24/7)

Suicide Crisis helpline: 0508 828 865

Text: 4357

Website: [www.lifeline.co.nz](http://www.lifeline.co.nz)

**3. The Low Down**

Phone: 0800 111 757

Text: 5626

Website: [www.thelowdown.co.nz](http://www.thelowdown.co.nz)

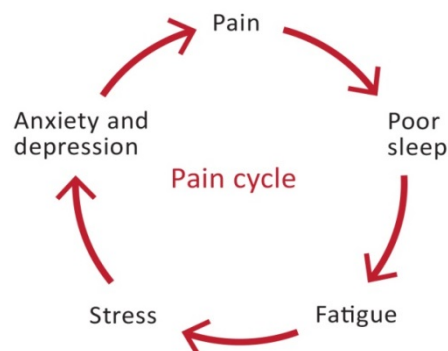
**If you continue to experience difficulty managing stress, anxiety, depression or sleep, speak to your GP**

## 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 generalised 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 generalised 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.
- There are health benefits of engaging in good work: a well-managed graduated return to work may be good for your overall health and recovery.
- Communicate with your employer about your health status. You do not need to share confidential details about your diagnosis and treatment, but you should share details about your fitness for your work duties, responsibilities and hours – and your likely recovery timeframes.
- 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" or "graduated" 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. The Health and Safety at Work Act requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations.
- 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. In occasional cases, where people are unable to return to work over an extended period, they may need to be medically retired.

# 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
Do you become breathless when walking up a flight of stairs or dressing yourself?							
Do you have any cough/throat sensitivity/voice change?							
Do you have any change in sense of smell or taste?							
Do you have any difficulty with swallowing liquids or solids?							
Do you feel tired (fatigued) during the day?							
Do you experience worsening of symptoms 6–24 hours after physical or mental exertion?							
Do you have any pain (joint pain/muscular pain/headache/abdominal pain)?							
Do you get palpitations (racing of heartbeat) during movement or activity?							
Do you get dizziness during movement or activity?							
Do you have difficulties with your sleep?							
Do you have problems with cognition (memory/concentration/planning)?							
Do you feel anxious?							
Do you feel low or depressed?							
Do you have any problems in communication (finding the right words)?							
Do you have problems with mobility (moving about)?							
Do you have problems with doing personal care activities such as bathing or dressing?							
Do you have problems doing other daily activities such as housework or shopping?							
Do you have any problems with caring for family members or interacting with friends?							
Other symptoms (insert) –							
Other symptoms (insert) –							
Other symptoms (insert) –							



**Waitematā**  
District Health Board

Best Care for Everyone



COUNTIES  
**MANUKAU**

HEALTH