



# Post COVID-19 Patient Information Pack

A guide to your recovery with advice  
on coping with and managing your  
symptoms

This information pack is for people who  
have, or have had COVID-19. It talks  
about what to expect in terms of  
recovery and covers things which can  
help.

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# **Understanding COVID-19**

# What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a highly infectious virus that mainly attacks the lungs. It is transmitted through droplets created from sneezing and coughing from those infected. The virus enters the body via the nose, mouth and eyes.

## The most commonly reported symptoms of COVID-19 are:

- A new continuous cough
- A fever (37.8C or greater)
- Fatigue
- Muscle aches
- Shortness of breath when moving around
- Sputum production
- Loss of, or change, in sense of taste/smell

1 in 3 people with COVID-19 are asymptomatic, meaning they do not experience symptoms.

## The severity and duration of symptoms for people who have COVID-19 can vary.

For most people, symptoms last 7-14 days and will be very mild. To manage mild symptoms:

- Stay hydrated
- Take paracetamol if you have a temperature
- Rest
- Get up and move about at regular intervals

### HOW TO USE A QR CODE:

Open your smart phone / tablet's camera and hover it over the QR code. It will then bring up a prompt for you to click on and it will take you to the linked website. We have also included web links so you can access the pages from a computer too

## For more information:



**NHS Fife COVID Information**  
<https://www.nhsfife.org/news-updates/campaigns-and-projects/coronavirus-information/>



**NHS Inform COVID-19**  
<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19>

## What to do if my symptoms get worse?

**Monitor your symptoms regularly. If you get one of the following:**

- Worsening shortness of breath
- A new or returning fever
- Worsening ability to concentrate
- Chest pain

**Please call 111 for more advice or dial 999 in a medical emergency.**

## How might I feel after having COVID-19

**Your symptoms may only last for a few weeks or you may have on going symptoms for some months.**

This pack contains information on how to manage:

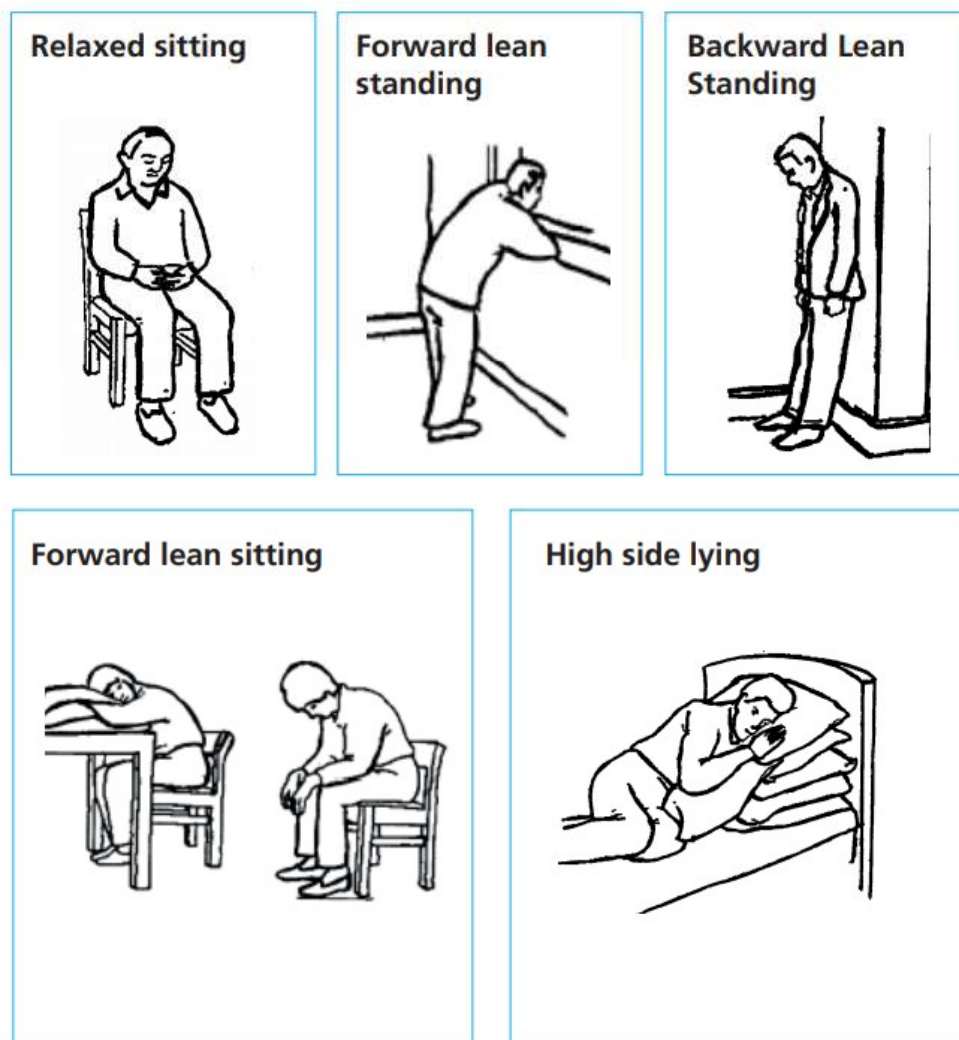
- Breathlessness
- Coughing
- Fatigue
- Mood
- Reduced fitness
- Sleep

# **Symptom Management**

# Positions to manage breathlessness

You may find that you continue to have some level of breathlessness after COVID-19.

You should monitor this and if it gets worse seek further review from your GP or 111. These positions can help ease your breathlessness and can be used when resting or when mobilising.



To view some videos on “good breathing” in lying, sitting and standing positions visit:

Physiotherapy for Breathing Pattern Disorders:

<https://www.physiotherapyforbpd.org.uk/self-help/#videos>

# Helpful breathing exercises

Breathing exercises can help you manage your breathlessness and reduce its impact on your every day activities.

## Breathing control

- Try to relax your shoulders and neck
- Take a slow breath in through your nose
- Allow the air to fill up from the bottom of your lungs to the top of your chest
- Breathe gently out through pursed lips (as if you were going to blow out a candle) to create space for the next breath in.

## Breathing control while walking

This will help you walk on the flat, climb stairs and negotiate slopes. Try to keep your shoulders and upper chest relaxed and use your breathing control. Time your breathing with your stepping.

- Breathe in – 1 step
- Breathe out – 1 or 2 steps

## Keep cool

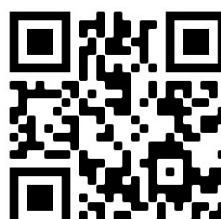
Make sure you have good air circulation in the room by opening a window or door. Use a wet flannel to cool the area around your nose and mouth this can help reduced the sensation of breathlessness.

## Breathing techniques can also be used to help manage the emotional impact of your physical symptoms.

Perhaps you are feeling anxious or worried about being unwell or about your recovery. Breathing exercises can help calm the body's threat system and help you relax.



Diaphragmatic  
breathing  
[https://youtu.be/ xQJ  
2O4b5TM](https://youtu.be/xQJ2O4b5TM)

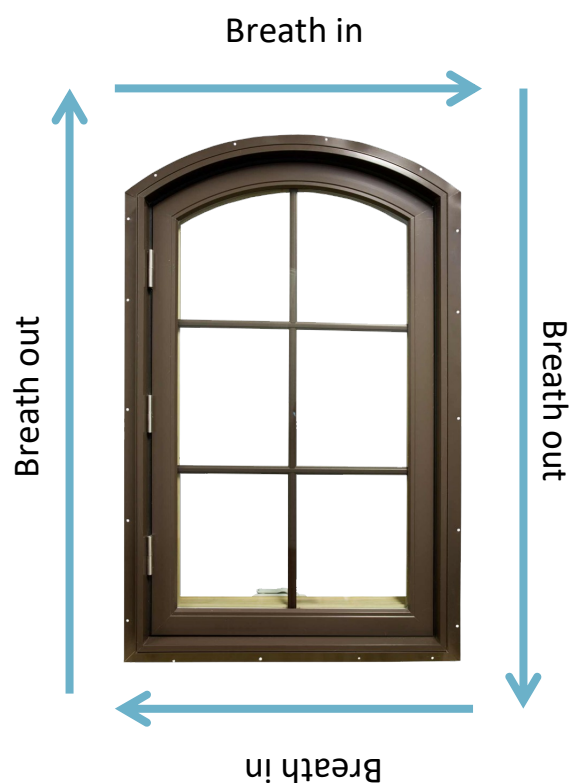


Deep breathing  
[https://youtu.be/j  
PMw2PlqJC8](https://youtu.be/jPMw2PlqJC8)



## Breathe a rectangle

- Find a comfortable position.
- Look for a rectangle shape in the room e.g. a window, door or TV screen.
- Move around the sides of the rectangle with your eyes, breathing in on the short sides and out on the long sides



You can find more information on breathlessness here:



**Chest Heart and Stroke  
Scotland breathlessness  
information booklet**  
[https://www.chss.org.uk/  
documents/2013/08/e1  
0\\_breathlessness.pdf](https://www.chss.org.uk/documents/2013/08/e10_breathlessness.pdf)



**NHS Your COVID Recovery  
Breathlessness**  
[https://www.yourcovidrecover  
y.nhs.uk/managing-the-  
effects/effects-on-your-  
body/breathlessness/](https://www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk/managing-the-effects/effects-on-your-body/breathlessness/)



**Post-COVID Syndrome Breathing**  
[https://www.physiotherapyforbpd.  
org.uk/wp-  
content/uploads/2017/06/Post-  
Covid-Syndrome-breathing-  
final.pdf](https://www.physiotherapyforbpd.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Post-Covid-Syndrome-breathing-final.pdf)

# Managing your cough

## How to manage a dry cough

- Stay well hydrated
- Sip a soft drink – take small sips, one after the other
- Steam inhalation – pour hot water into a bowl and put your head over the bowl. If comfortable, cover your head and bowl with a towel
- A warm drink (e.g. honey and lemon) can help soothe the throat
- If you do not have a drink to hand, but need to cough, try swallowing over and over. This can work in the same way as sipping water

## How to manage a productive cough

- Keep well hydrated
- Steam inhalation
- Lie as flat as you can on your side. This can help drain the phlegm
- Moving around can help to move the phlegm. This will make it easier to cough it out

# Exercises to help clear your chest

Following COVID-19 you may find that you have a productive cough and mucus on your chest. These exercises can help you clear your chest. These may be recommended by your physiotherapist or nurse following COVID-19.

Active Cycle of Breathing Technique (ACBT) exercise consists of three breathing exercises that together help to clear the mucus off your chest.

## Breathing control

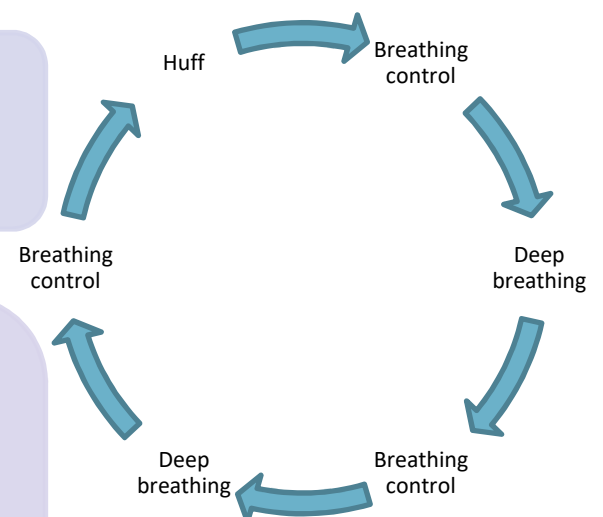
- Gentle, relaxed breathing with your shoulders relaxed

## Deep breaths

- Breath in slowly and deeply
- Gently breath out without forcing it
- Repeat 3-4 times only (too many can make you feel dizzy)

## Forced expiration technique (Huff)

- Take a medium sized breath in
- Breath out forcefully for a short time
- Keep your mouth open and use your stomach and chest muscles
- Think 'huffing' a mirror to polish it
- Repeat 1-2 times
- Always finish on a cough or huff
- Stop when your huff is dry on two consecutive cycles



### How often and how long?

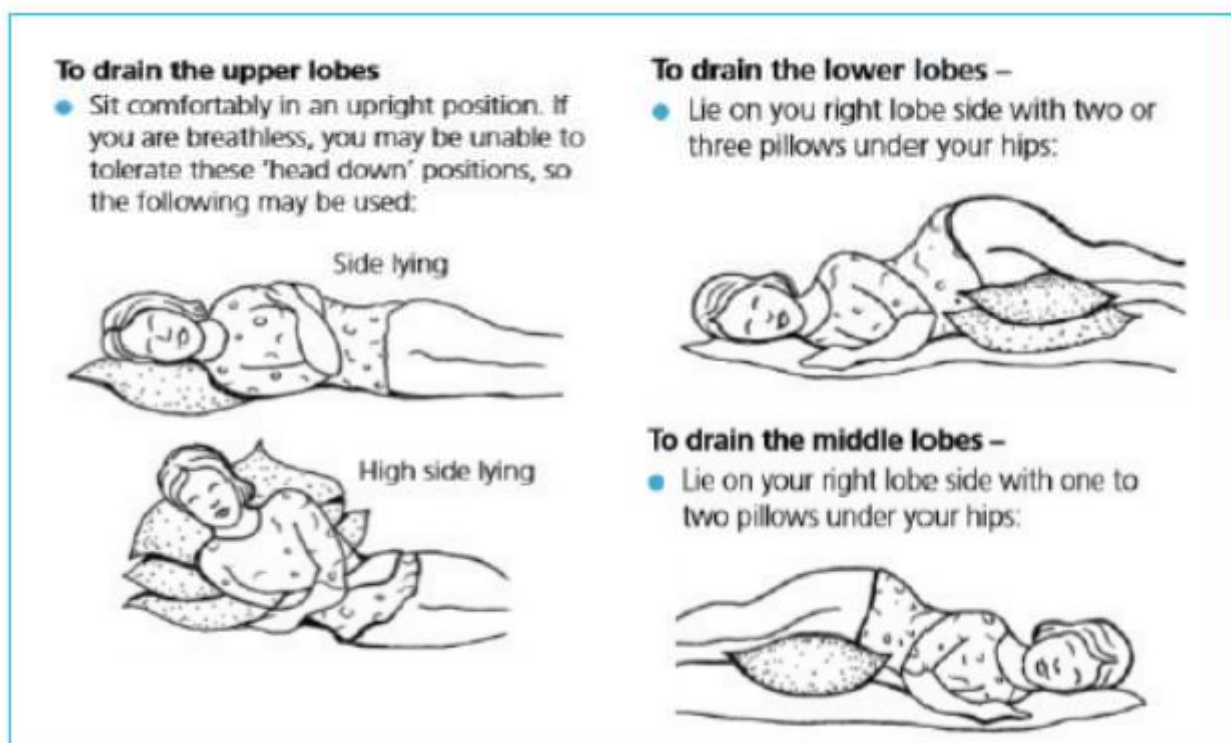
- Continue to do until you feel your chest is clearer
- Clear as much mucus as you can without becoming exhausted
- Perform for at least 10 minutes, but no longer than 30 minutes
- If productive 2-3 times per day

# Positions to help keep your chest clear

Use the following positions, along with ACBT to help clear your chest. However:

- Don't use immediately before or after a meal
- Stop if you have any side effects

Chose the position below that you feel would best drain your lungs, you can do this in discussion with a health care professional.



**Do not do this if have:**

- Nausea
- Acid Reflux
- Become significantly breathless
- Have blood in your phlegm
- Have a recent chest, spine or rib injury
- Feel wheezy

If you have any of the above, please speak with a health care professional before doing this.

# Fatigue management

When you are recovering from COVID-19 you might find that your energy levels fluctuate day to day.

- Walking around your home might be difficult and managing stairs might be more challenging than normal.
- You might find that you have to adapt your daily routine to help manage fatigue.

If you are struggling to carry out tasks of daily living (e.g. washing, dressing etc) then you may need a referral to Occupation Therapy services for an assessment.

## Getting to grips with your fatigue



If you imagine that you have 10 x energy coins to spend each day.



When you are feeling well, having a shower might cost you 1 x energy coin.



Whilst you are recovering, having a shower might cost you 4 x energy coins – the price has been inflated due to the fatigue! So now you only have 6 x energy coins for the rest of the day.

Find out more about managing fatigue here:



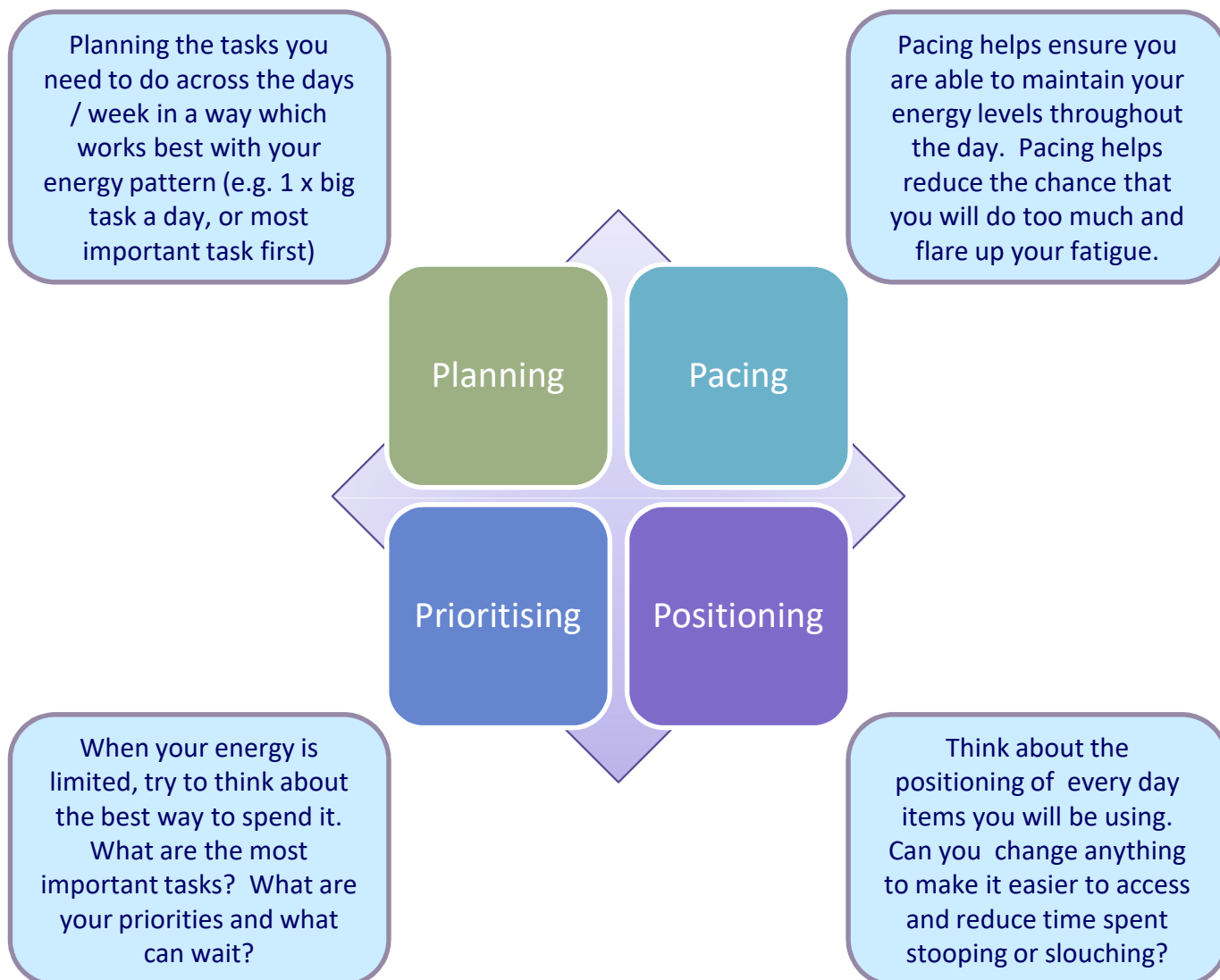
*How to manage fatigue after recovering from COVID-19* by HealthiNation Wellness  
<https://youtu.be/NeD9vhp58u4>



*COVID-19: The Road to Recovery* by Chartered Society of Physiotherapy  
<https://youtu.be/3sURTAaxmc8>

# Using the 4 P's to manage fatigue

Whilst you are living with fatigue you may wish to consider the 4 P's as a way to conserve energy.



## Top Tips!

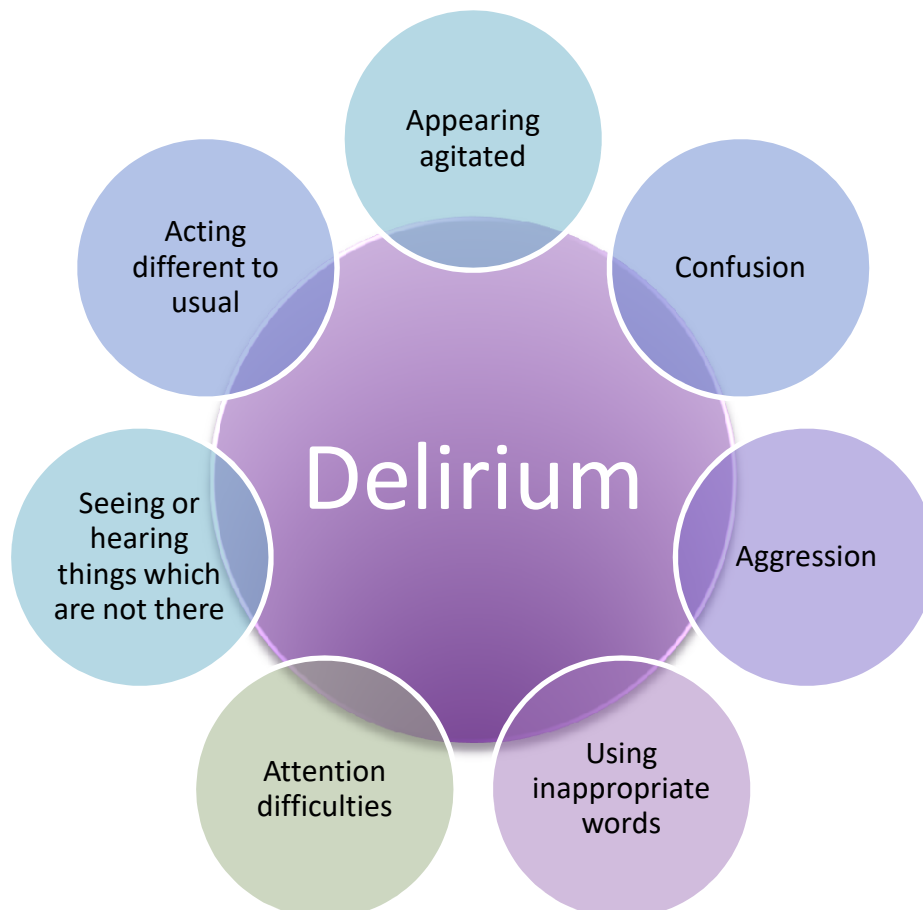
- Leave items you need frequently out in accessible places
- Have duplicate items to limit trips required (e.g. 2<sup>nd</sup> toothbrush at kitchen sink)
- Take regular rests when completing longer tasks
- Ask for help, or delegate tasks.
- If you are doing a task with a TV show playing in the background, stop and rest for the duration of the advert breaks each time they come on

# If you spent time in Intensive Care (ICU)

After a stay in the intensive care unit (ICU) some patients can experience a number of symptoms known as Post Intensive Care Syndrome (PICS).

Symptoms of PICS are:

- Physical weakness. Having a long stay in ICU can affect muscles and nerves throughout the body leading to muscle wasting, nerve (neuropathic) pain and numbness (paraesthesia) in some areas of the body
- Problems with balance and coordination
- Delirium. This occurs in about 80% of ICU patients. It occurs in ALL ages and is caused by changes in the way the brain works. These changes in the brain can be caused by the critical illness, or infection and the medicines used in ICU. It is more likely to occur if you were on a breathing machine whilst in ICU. Delirium usually resolves after you leave ICU.



# If you spent time in Intensive Care (ICU)

Some patients who have spent time in ICU can have some difficulties which can take a while to subside.

These longer lasting problems include:

- **Problems with concentration and memory.**

Memory is a complex brain activity and takes time to recover when you have been unwell. This means following your ICU stay you might have to have things repeated to you several times, or you may find you forget what has been said to you easily. You may also find it difficult to concentrate on something for any length of time.

- **Anxiety, depression, sleep disturbance and/or nightmares and flashbacks**

These symptoms are very common and very normal after being in ICU. Remember that you have been through a really traumatic experience which is going to take a while to get over. In most cases these more psychological symptoms will subside, but for some patients they can persist. If they do persist, seek help from your GP who can refer you to an appropriate service for support and treatment.

- **Reduced appetite**

Following an ICU stay some patients also commonly report feeling less hungry. Changes in sense of smell and taste are common after ICU and contribute to this. After a stay in ICU with a severe illness, many struggle with eating the standard “3 square meals” a day. If you do struggle with your appetite after ICU then speak to your GP about this.

***The Intensive Care Society website has a useful COVID-19 Resource Hub***

***<https://www.ics.ac.uk/ICS/COVID-19/COVID19.aspx?hkey=d176e2cf-d3ba-4bc7-8435-49bc618c345a>***





# The emotional impact

Having COVID-19 can be frightening. It is understandable that you might find that your mood is affected when you are unwell, or whilst you are recovering.

There are many ways COVID can impact on your mood, but some common ones are:

## Anxiety

- Fears about your health and recovery
- Stress about being off work and finances
- Worries about your friends and family getting ill

## Low mood

- Feeling low from being isolated
- Being unable to do some of the things that bring you joy and feel fulfilling

## Anger

- Feeling frustrated that your not recovering as quick as you would like
- Feeling angry at the situation

## Trauma

- Flashbacks or nightmares of the time you were seriously unwell
- Intrusive thoughts and images about not getting better

# What can I do to manage the emotional impact?

There are lots of things you can do to try and manage the impact your recovery is having on your mood.

## Practical problem solving

- Simple practical ideas can help ease the pressure as you recover.
  - If memory is difficult – use reminders in your phone or use written lists
  - If hearing about COVID-19 on the TV makes you feel stressed, limit how often you watch the news

## Be kind to yourself!

- Often we can be hard on ourselves for not getting better as quick as we would like. Or we beat ourselves up for not doing our “fair share” of the house work / childcare / life admin tasks.
  - It is ok to give your mind and body time and space to rest – you are recovering. You wouldn't ask someone with a broken leg to run a race!

## Connection

- Using your support network is a helpful tool to manage mood.
  - Feeling a sense of connection is helpful. Think about how you might go about building in more connection when you are recovering (e.g. texting a friend, video-calling a family member or going for a short walk with a colleague)
  - It can be helpful to speak to friends and family about how you are feeling and what you are finding difficult.
  - Your network might be able to provide some practical support whilst you are recovering, which takes the pressure off you.

## Mood coping tools

- Over the next few pages we will go over some specific coping tools

If mood continues to feel difficult or gets worse, speak to your GP who refer you on to appropriate services.

# Relaxation techniques

When we are stressed or anxious our muscles tense up. This tension causes uncomfortable bodily feelings such as headaches and backache. The aches and pains of tension can cause worry, making us even more anxious and tense. Relaxation helps release tension and to calm and sooth the body. Relaxation can be used as a tool to manage the tension caused by stress and anxiety.

It is a good idea to try and do some form of relaxation each day. There are a number of things you can do which you might find relaxing (e.g. having a bath, reading a book or going for a walk in nature). You can also learn how to use specific relaxation techniques. There are many different types and you might need to experiment to see which have the most relaxing effect on you.

## Remember:

- Practice is important! Although the relaxation techniques are not complex, they are still a new skill and you will still need to practice to build up your confidence and ability to use them.
- Initially try to practice them when you feel calm. This will mean you are able to concentrate on them as well as possible. Once you feel you have a good understanding of how to do the exercise you can then start using them when you feel stressed or anxious.



Deep  
breathing

<https://youtu.be/iPMw2PlqJC8>



Progressive  
Muscle  
Relaxation

<https://youtu.be/9GURt2pvdAg>



Visualisation

<https://youtu.be/ULZ1HECCyYU>



Guided  
Imagery

<https://youtu.be/qJTVg6KvjJE>



Developing  
Personal  
Resources

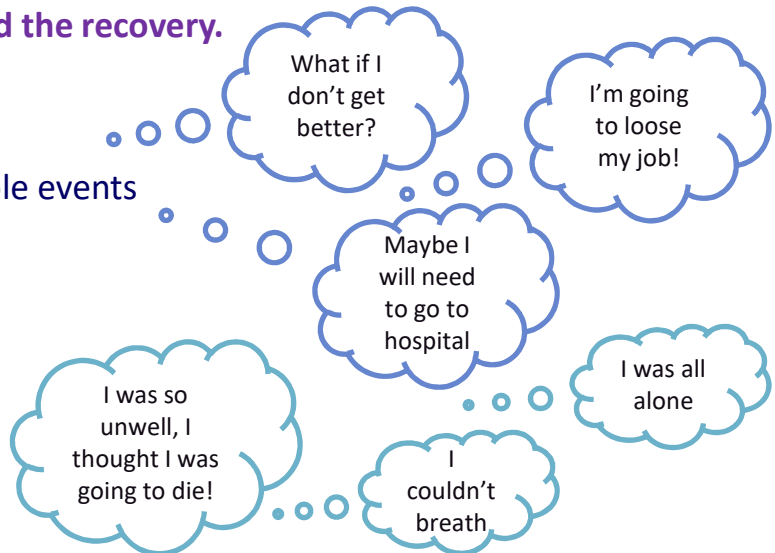
<https://youtu.be/zU4xJ41lfa8>

# Mindfulness

Often when we are unwell we can find ourselves consumed by thoughts about the illness, our symptoms and the recovery.

Often our thoughts are:

- Focused on future possible events
- Going over past events



Mindfulness is “**paying attention, on purpose, to the present, without judgement**” (Jon Kabat-Zinn). Learning mindfulness can help you to notice when your attention has wandered to a past or future focus and to be able to bring it back to the present moment.

Mindfulness has been found to be a helpful tool for managing psychological difficulties.

Find out more about what mindfulness is here:



Try out different types of mindfulness here:

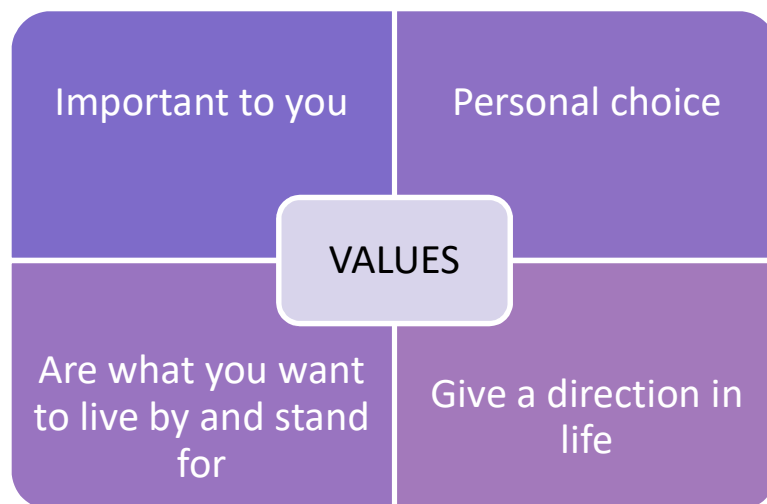


# Values based living

A value is a belief, principle or standard of behaviour that we hold to be important. We use these beliefs to guide us through life when making choices or when deciding what is important to us. Living life in keeping with our values is good for mood. It can make life feel meaningful and fulfilling.

It can often be the case that when you are living with physical health symptoms, or recovering from illness, you can lose track of what matters to you in your life. Often you can become 'caught up' in thinking about the way your health has changed. Or maybe you have become very focused on trying to find a cure, or a medical solution to your problems. Or maybe your physical symptoms mean that doing the types of activities you used to value are not currently possible.

We often approach life in a goals focused way. Then when we are faced with a barrier or obstacle that is outwith our control (e.g. Like a physical health symptom) we can become stuck. Taking a valued based approach, rather than a goal focused approach, can give you the flexibility to still move forward towards your value despite the barriers and challenges. An example illustrating this can be found on the next page.



**Goals vs. Values**

<https://youtu.be/T-IRbuy4XtA>

# Values based living continued

**EXAMPLE:** When you were well you used to go hill walking every week with your friend. You found this really fulfilling and it helped maintain good mental health

**PROBLEM:** Since having COVID-19 you haven't been well enough to go hill walking. You spend most of your time at home and have found that you feel bored, irritated and low.

**USING A GOALS ONLY APPROACH:** Your goal of hill walking once a week isn't possible until you fully recover.... so it's a waiting game....

**USING A VALUED BASED APPROACH:** If you identified the underpinning value that meant that hill walking with your friend was fulfilling was "connection", you can now think about other activities that would allow you to get a sense of connection, but aren't so physically demanding (e.g. Meeting for a coffee and a catch up at a local cafe). If you identified the underpinning value as "challenge", then you can think about other tasks which would challenge you, but are achievable given your stage of recovery (e.g. To work your way through a puzzle book or try a learn a language app)



*Better Living with Illness: Video 3 What is important to you?*  
<https://youtu.be/zXwTSSMPEBI>

# Lifestyle Factors

# Managing your diet post COVID-19

When you are recovering from COVID-19 it is important to think about your diet and make sure you are fuelling your body with enough energy and fluids to fight the infection. The body needs more protein when recovering to repair and enough vitamins and minerals to aid this process. It can be helpful to do a quick “check-in” to see if your diet is meeting your needs.



Aim to have 3 hand sized portions of protein a day (e.g. Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat)



Aim to have 3 thumb sized items from the dairy group a day



Aim to have 5 handful sized portions of fruit and vegetables a day.

If you feel you need more support speak with your GP and they can refer you to a dietician.



**Your COVID Recovery: Eating Well**

<https://www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk/your-wellbeing/eating-well/>



# Physical Activity

As you recover it is important to reintroduce physical activity. Remember if you are experiencing fatigue you will need to introduce activity using pacing (See page 11 and 12). If you spent a period of time in hospital with COVID-19 your muscles may be much weaker than before you became unwell and you have lost fitness, so it is important to reintroduce exercise in a graded way to rebuild strength, fitness and coordination.

## Why increasing physical activity is an important part of recover

- Increasing physical activity will help you regain fitness, strength and mobility
- It will mean you are more able to do the tasks of daily living that you need to, as well as the valued activities which are important to you.

## How to get going with building up physical activity?

- Start slowly and build up over time
- Little and often is most helpful
- Set yourself small goals each day
- Aim for a daily walk
- Allow yourself rests

To learn more about exercising after COVID-19, including examples of types of exercises you could try, have a look at the short videos below:



**WHO Regional Office for Europe: Rehabilitation Self-Management after COVID-19: Exercise after illness**

<https://youtu.be/bJtPMGZMUw8>



**COVID Recovery Exercises**  
<https://youtu.be/muxMvjh1IX4>

# Sleep

If you spent some time in hospital you may have found your sleep pattern was disrupted by the busy environment or as a side effect to some of the medications you were on.

It is not uncommon for people to have dreams relating to their hospital stay which can seem very real and frightening. Often these symptoms reduce over time, but if they persist or get worse contact your GP for further advice.

Having good “sleep hygiene” can be helpful for setting the right conditions to promote good sleep.

Although it can be tricky, it is important to try and not worry about lack of sleep, as worry in itself can get in the way of sleep. Using some of the mood coping tools discussed on pages 17 and 18 can help you be as relaxed and calm as possible as you try to go to sleep.



**Tips for better sleep  
self help guide via  
Access Therapies Fife**  
<https://www.accesstherapiesfife.scot.nhs.uk/self-help-guides-2/>



**Sleepio – Sleep  
improvement  
programme**  
<https://www.accesstherapiesfife.scot.nhs.uk/booking-sleepio-and-daylight-programmes/>

# Smoking and COVID-19

Smoking tobacco products increases your risk of infection due to the harm caused to your immune system and lungs.

Smoking has been linked with poorer outcomes in COVID-19.

You may be experiencing higher levels of stress and worry due to COVID-19 and you might feel that smoking is one strategy to help you cope and relax. It can be helpful to try and build up a range of other coping skills so that you can manage your mood without needing to rely on smoking. Have a look at some of the strategies on pages 17-20 for ideas of things to try.

For support with stopping smoking you can access the NHS Fife Stop Smoking Service where they will help you “Quit Your Way”.

- 0800 025 300
- Fife.smokingcessation@nhs.scot



**NHS Inform COVID-19 Stop Smoking**

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/healthy-living/coronavirus-covid-19-stopping-smoking#overview>

# Returning to work

Going back to work after illness can be challenging. Persisting symptoms such as shortness of breath, fatigue, poor concentration, and anxiety can all make return to work more difficult. The longer you are off sick, the harder it can be to go back to work. Doing the right kind of work is good for your mental and physical health, even if you have a health condition.

Talk to your GP and your employer about what you are able to do and how your return to work can be helped. Your employer should be willing to put reasonable adjustments in place to allow you to work safely and productively. If your employer has access to an Occupational Health service this will provide helpful guidance.

**Local help is also available to you and your employer:**

**Working Health Services** provides free and confidential return to work advice and health support for paid workers in small to medium companies (less than 250 employees) and the self-employed. Individuals struggling at work or absent from work can contact this service and receive specific health condition management advice with the aim to help them stay at work or get back to work as soon as possible.

For more information contact: Malcolm Joss: Email: [malcolm.joss@nhs.scot](mailto:malcolm.joss@nhs.scot)  
Tel: 01592 643355 Ext.20420, Mob: 07771947060, Mon(PM), Wed (PM) & Fri)

**Workplace Team, Health Promotion Service** provide free and confidential support and advice to help Fife employers and workers create a healthier and safer working environment to promote Good Work. They can provide guidance to workers and employers on how to manage return to work after COVID-19 infection.

For more information contact:  
Email: [fife.hwlfife@nhs.scot](mailto:fife.hwlfife@nhs.scot)  
Tel: [01592 226 526](tel:01592226526)  
Web: [www.nhsfife.org/workplace](http://www.nhsfife.org/workplace)



# Practical Support

Information on local support services, money advice, and testing can be found at:



***Fife Council Community Support and Assistance***

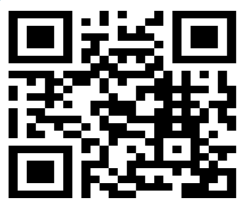
<https://www.fife.gov.uk/kb/docs/articles/health-and-social-care2/coronavirus-covid-19/community-groups>

# Next Steps

# What should I do if my symptoms do not improve?

If your symptoms do not improve, contact your GP to discuss your concerns. They can advise you on appropriate next steps and refer you on to specialist services.

If you wish to access self-help, some useful websites include:



## Moodcafe

- <https://www.moodcafe.co.uk/>
- Website containing mental health and emotional wellbeing resources



## Access Therapies Fife

- <https://www.accesstherapiesfife.scot.nhs.uk/>
- Website with mental health self help resources, and self-referral routes to emotion wellbeing coping classes



## Local Supports and Resources

- <https://www.accesstherapiesfife.scot.nhs.uk/local-support-and-resources/>
- Links to local support services



## Physical Activity Resources

- <https://www.accesstherapiesfife.scot.nhs.uk/physical-activity-resources/>
- Links to physical activity resources



## Fife Sport and Leisure Trust

- <https://www.youtube.com/user/FifeLeisure/videos>
- Link to Fife Sport and Leisure Trust YouTube channel
- Can also find further information about services at: <https://www.fifeleisure.org.uk/>

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NHS Fife SMS text service number 07805800005 is available for people who have a hearing or speech impairment.

To find out more about accessible formats contact:  
[fife.EqualityandHumanRights@nhs.scot](mailto:fife.EqualityandHumanRights@nhs.scot)  
or phone 01592 729130