

Coping with Covid-19

**Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy Advice
for Day to Day Living**



What is Covid-19?

Covid-19 (Coronavirus) is an illness caused by a new strain of coronavirus that was first identified in Wuhan, China. It can cause a wide range of symptoms including a cough, fever and, or high temperature.

Most people infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory symptoms and recover without needing special treatment.

However, it can cause more severe symptoms in those who have weakened immune systems, older people or those with long term conditions such as diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease.

Managing breathlessness

Breathlessness is a common symptom in many respiratory conditions. It can be a very frightening experience but it is not harmful or causing any further deterioration in your condition, it is simply a symptom which arises as a result of your condition. You can be confident that you will get your breath back with time.

What to do in a breathless episode

- Stop any activity
- Try one of the following positions:
 - » standing or sitting lean forward or
 - » stand relaxed with your shoulder blades against a wall



- Try Breathing exercises :
 - » Focus on a long breath out, longer than your breath in
 - » On your breath out, purse your lips as if to whistle
 - » Concentrate on the rise and fall of your tummy, try and keep your tummy, shoulders and upper chest relaxed throughout.
 - » Don't rush in to your next breath, wait for it to come.

You may find it beneficial to practice the above steps when you do not feel breathless to familiarise yourself and find which positions you find most helpful.

Energy Conservation

Energy conservation is a group of strategies used to maintain activity levels, manage fatigue and improve activity tolerance. It means getting the most of the body's available energy and getting the right amount of work done for the amount of energy you have

What?

Prioritise what really needs done, leave less important jobs until you have finished the more important ones.

When?

Choose the best time of day.

For example, leave tidying the home until later in the day if you have already showered that morning.

Why?

Why are you doing this job? Is it for you, or someone else? Can it be delegated to someone else? Ask for help.

How?

Can you break the task up into manageable stages with breaks in-between? Is there any preparation that could be done to make the task easier e.g. collect all clothing before dressing? Can you perform a task in sitting instead of standing? Plan ahead.

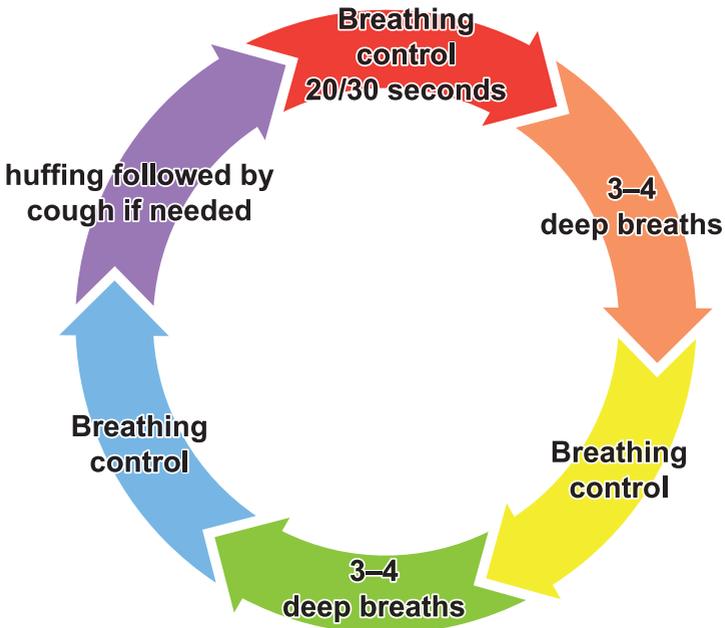
Pacing and Spacing

Pacing is another element of energy conservation. It means slowing down to avoid using all your energy early in the day. Spacing out tasks and taking plenty of time between tasks can let you get back some energy. This may be a few minutes, hours or longer.

Deep Breathing Exercises

If you feel that you have secretions in your chest, complete the following breathing exercise to clear your chest. You can do this before you go to bed and when you wake to make your chest is clear.

You can repeat this cycle for around 10 minutes or until your chest feels clear.



Breathing Control - Breathe in through your nose and out through either your nose or mouth, breathe at a rate that is comfortable for you.

Deep breathing - Take a long and slow deep breath in through your nose, hold your breath for 2-3 seconds before breathing out gently.

Huff - Take a deep breath in and then with your mouth open breathe out quickly as if trying to steam up a mirror.

If you can hear crackles when you huff, try a cough to clear any secretions.

Coughing

If you feel a cough coming and you know that it will not bring up the secretions in your chest, it is best to avoid coughing as it can cause fatigue, strain your pelvic floor and prevent sleep.

When you feel a cough coming, ask yourself if it's wet or dry.

If it is wet:

- Use a huff technique (take a deep breath in through your nose, open your mouth wide and force a breath out)

If it is dry:

- Tell yourself you do not need to cough
- Try breathing through your nose
- Swallow or take sips of water
- Suck on a lozenge (Tunes, Fisherman's Friend, Locketts, Halls)

The following deconstriction exercises can help relax your voice box and prevent coughing:

1. Open your mouth as if to yawn. This will stretch your vocal cords.
2. Stick your tongue out as far as possible.
3. Relax the lips and throat by blowing raspberries with your tongue.

Stay hydrated – you need to drink 2 litres of fluids a day.

Coping after Covid-19

Many people have difficulty with their memory after a period of being unwell; some may even have little to no memory of parts of their stay in hospital. This can be due to developing delirium which occurs when you are unwell and your brain can't lay down memories properly leading to confusion, unusual thoughts, flashbacks and nightmares.

Normally these symptoms improve over time and talking to other people can be useful to help with this.

Some coping strategies that can be used at home are:

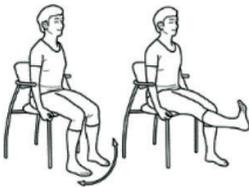
- Talking to family and friends to share your experience and any worries
- Avoid alcohol
- Try to maintain a routine
- Eat a healthy diet
- Write down your thoughts
- Practice good sleep hygiene (habits and practices that help you sleep better e.g. not watching television before bed)

Physical Activity

Following your admission to hospital it is normal to feel weak and fatigued and even the slightest activity may take tremendous effort.

You may have lost some weight and muscle strength resulting in your nerves and muscles getting thinner and weaker and your joints becoming stiff.

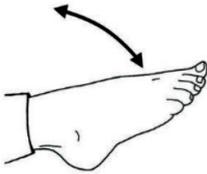
It is expected that you will still feel breathless after leaving hospital so when exercising at home you should aim to feel breathless but you should still be able to speak.



Sit on a sturdy chair with your feet on the floor.

Straighten your knee using your front thigh muscles.

Repeat times 10 times each leg.



Either sitting in a chair or lying down, bend and straighten your ankles as much as possible.

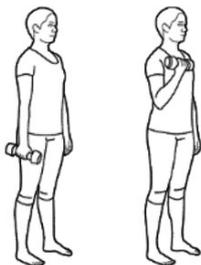
Repeat for 2 minutes with each foot.



Stand straight holding on to a support.

Lift your leg sideways and bring it back keeping your trunk straight throughout.

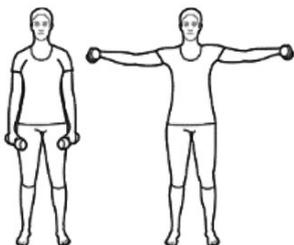
Repeat 10-15 times on each leg.



Stand facing a wall with your arms straight and hands on the wall.

Do push-ups against the wall keeping your body in a straight line.

Repeat times 10-15 times.



Stand holding a weight e.g. water bottle with your palm facing inwards.

Bend your elbow and bring your hand towards your shoulder. Lower slowly.

Repeat times 10-15 times each side.



Stand with arms by your sides, holding weights. Lift your arms to the side, keeping elbows straight.

Repeat times 10-15 times each side

Hold weight e.g. water bottle at shoulder height, elbows pointing forward. Press weights up by straightening your elbows. Return back to the starting position.

Repeat times 10-15 times each side.



Start sitting in a chair. Stand up and sit yourself back down.

Repeat 10-15 times

Recovering from Intensive Care

During your time in hospital you may have stayed in one of our critical care beds. This may have been for a few days, weeks or even months.

Many people who leave the intensive care unit (ICU) will make a good recovery but with this sometimes there can be ongoing problems such as:

- weakness and stiffness
- extreme tiredness (fatigue) and a lack of energy
- loss of appetite and weight loss
- sleep problems
- mood changes, depression and anxiety
- problems with mental abilities – for example, not being able to think clearly, difficulty concentrating or being forgetful

This is normal and should settle with time. Get medical advice if these issues continue.

Some people may require ongoing support and treatment to help them recover.

If you would like to learn more or hear from others who have left ICU go to Intensive Care Society website (www.ics.ac.uk), and look for the patients and relatives section.

Information for Relatives

While your relative was in hospital you would have had limited contact with them which may have caused emotions such as anxiety and stress. You may have had difficulty with eating or sleeping and by the time your relative returns home your 'tank' may be running low on energy.

Following on from this you may find yourself in a position where you have to help to care for your relative more than you did previously which can also be a drain on your energy stores.

Things that may help:

- Make sure to look after your own mental health
- Talk to your relative
- Talk to family or friends
- Maintain a routine for both you and your relative

If you find that you are still struggling, contact your GP.

