

COVID-19 Rehabilitation

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What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a virus which causes a raised temperature, a sore throat, a cough (or more coughing than usual) and an increase in shortness of breath. It spreads from droplets from the nose or mouth when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

How does it affect your breathing?

- The virus sits in the throat causing inflammation and making you cough
- It affects the lungs, causing pneumonia, and leading to shortness of breath
- In severe cases, it can damage the lining of the lungs, causing them to fill with fluid. This may cause severe difficulty in breathing and you may need to be taken into a hospital and, in some cases, you may require a ventilator
- When you leave hospital, it is normal for you to still feel breathless and easily fatigued with everyday tasks for several weeks

Recovery

Recovery will take time, but the amount of time it takes will vary from person to person and no two people will have the same experience. However, some common effects of COVID-19 are discussed in this booklet.

This booklet is a general guide and your doctors and therapists will discuss your specific medical care and onward recovery with you in more detail. This booklet contains simple treatment techniques to support your recovery.

Common physical symptoms

- Breathlessness
- Cough and phlegm
- Muscle weakness and joint stiffness
- Extreme tiredness and lack of energy (sometimes called fatigue)
- Loss of appetite and weight loss

Common things that you might feel after COVID-19

- Feelings of being frightened or anxious
- Problems with memory or your thinking processes
- Delirium-acute confusional state
- Nightmares or flashbacks

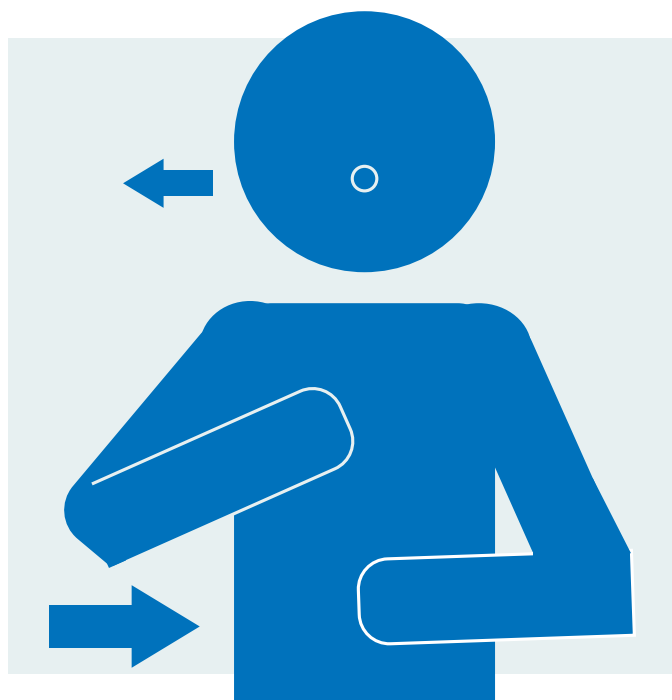
Breathlessness

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

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

Breathing control

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



Breathlessness scale

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

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

Positions of ease

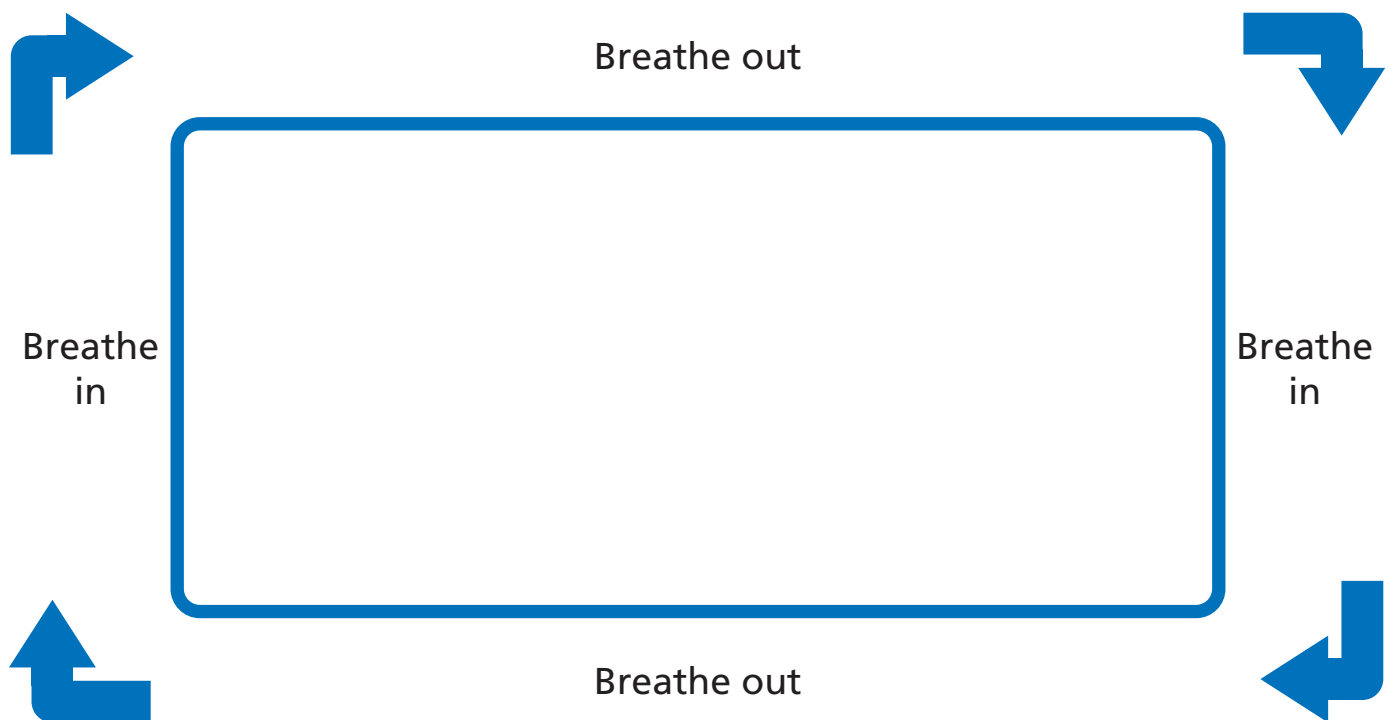
The following positions support the muscles in the body that help with breathing. When in these positions, relax your neck, jaw, shoulders, wrists and hands.



Lying on your front can help to get more oxygen into your body, and aid mucus clearance

Rectangular breathing

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



Being mobile

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

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

Setting goals for recovery

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

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

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

Pacing

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

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

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

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

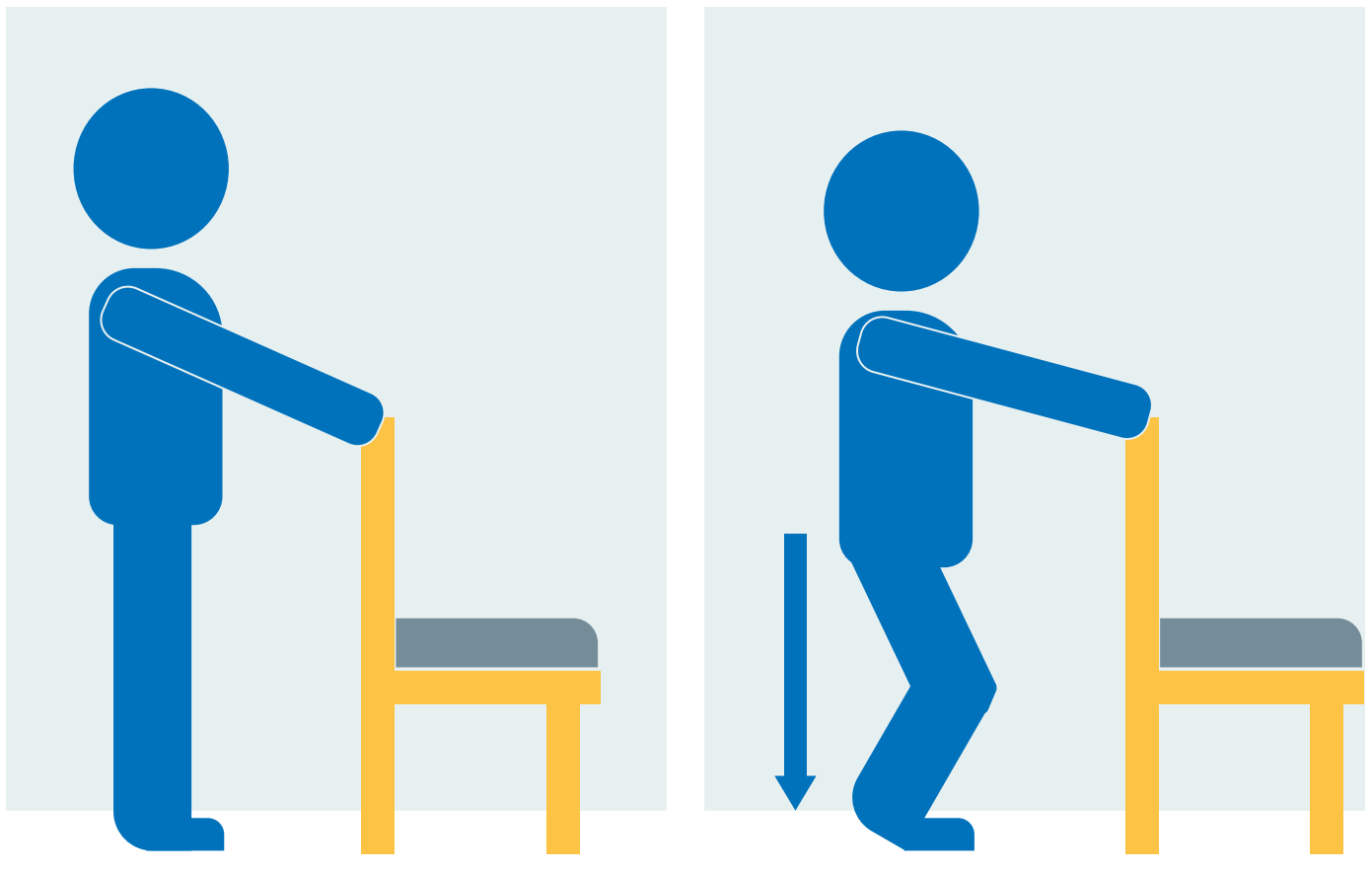
Try NOT to compare yourself to others – your energy levels are specific to you.

Exercises

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

1. Half squat

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



Progression

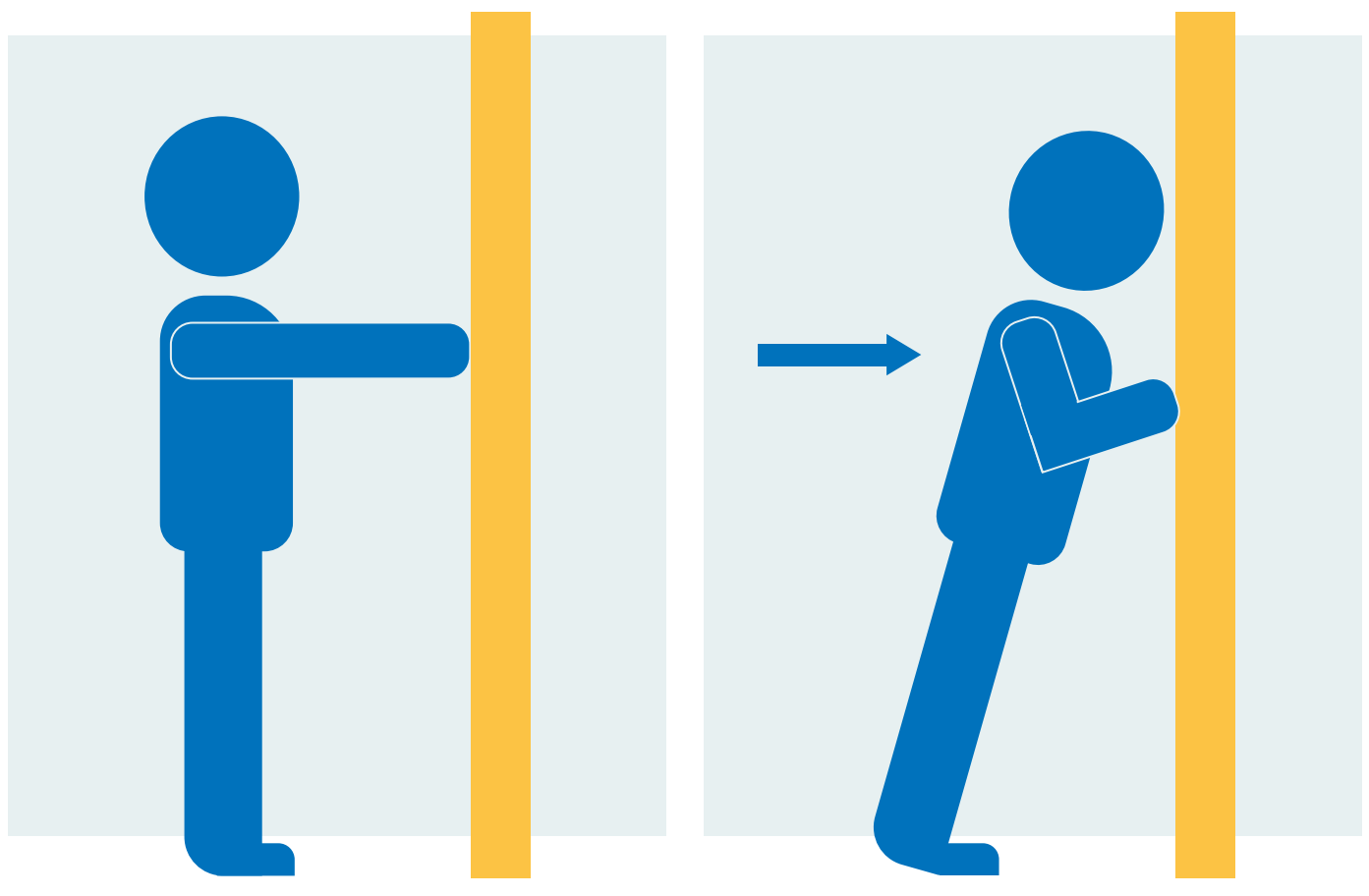
- Full squat
- Squat holding weights
- Increase number of repetitions

Alternative

- Lunges
- Sit to stand (not using arms)

2. Standing press-up

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

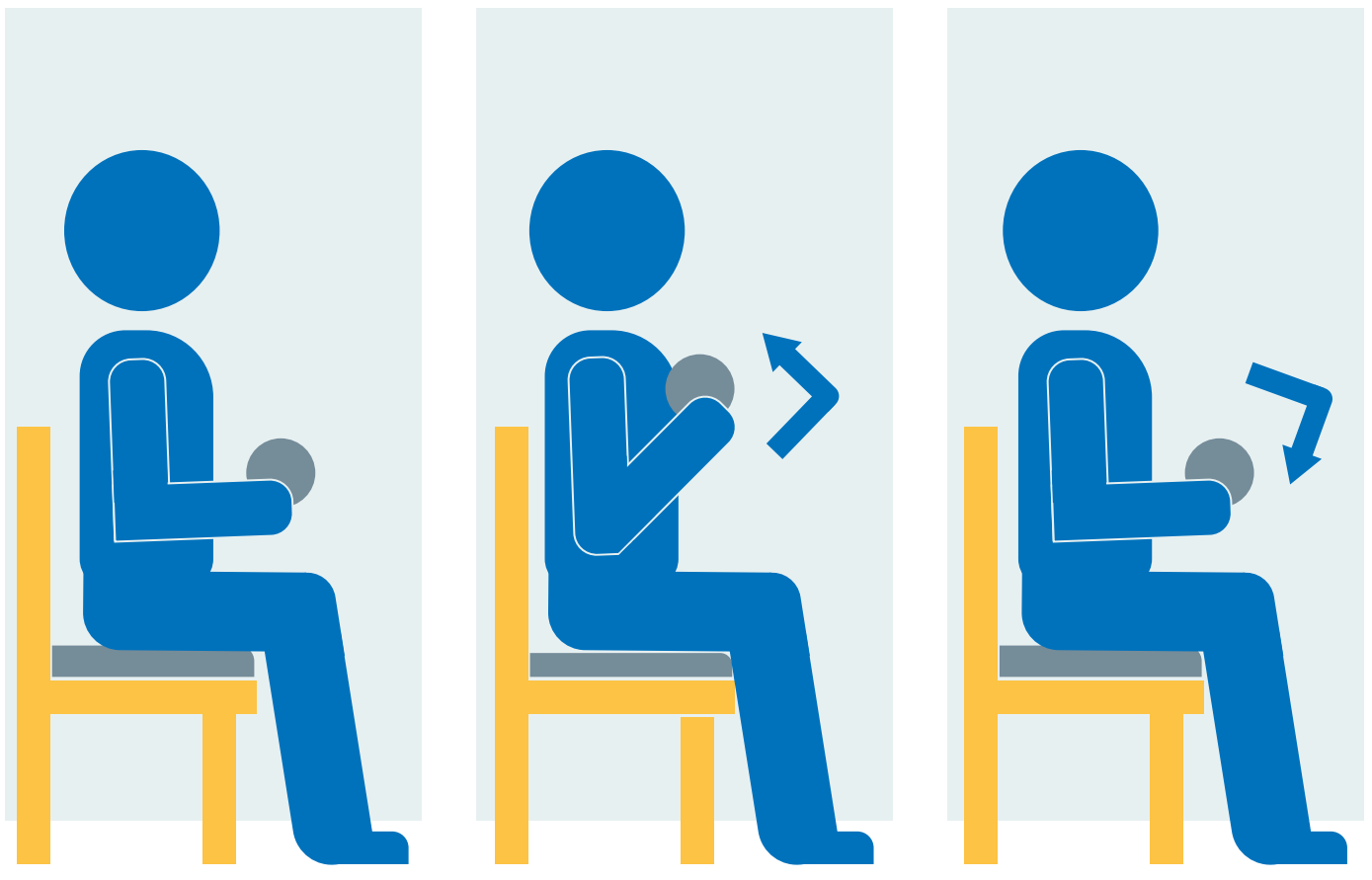


Progression

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

3. Bicep curls

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



Progression

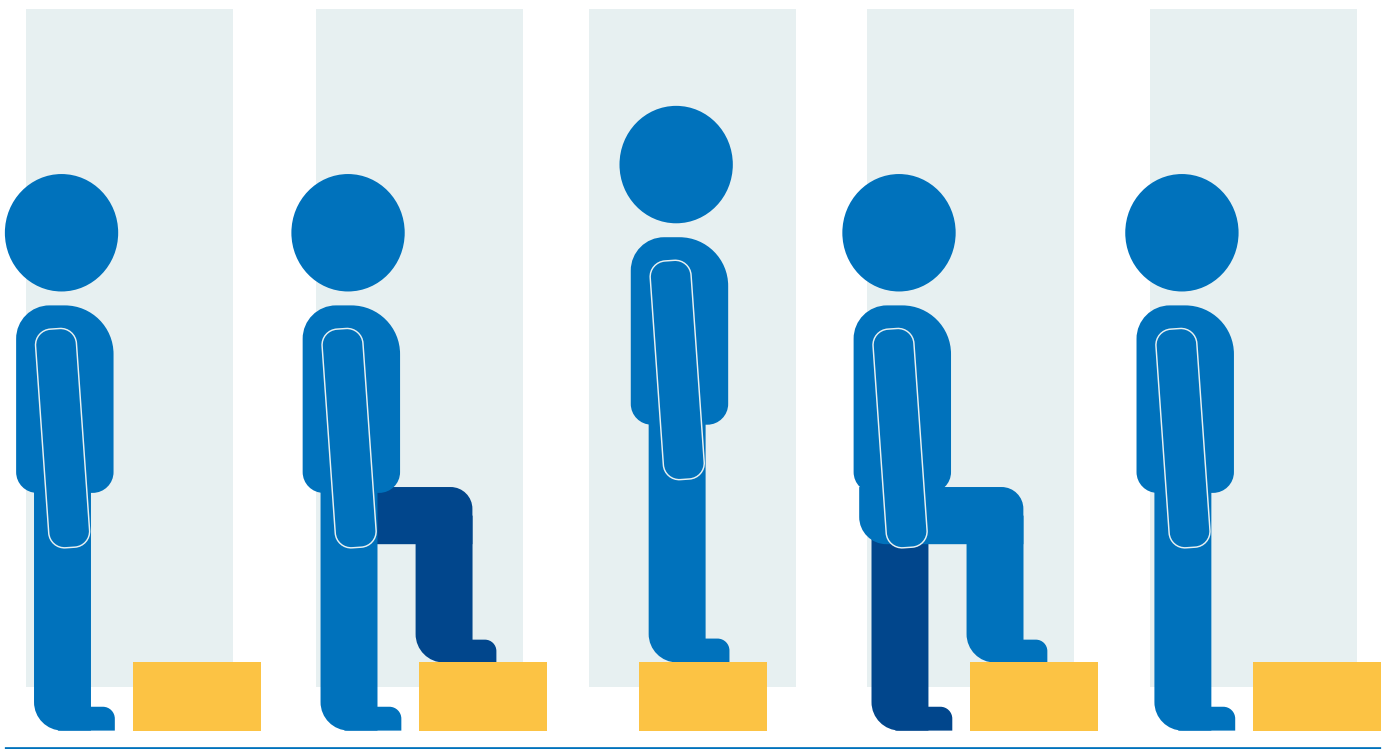
- Increase weight and/ or repetitions
- Stand up to perform exercise

Milk bottle weights filled with water, for reference:

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

4. Step-ups

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



Progression

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

Progression of exercise and function post-recovery from COVID-19

- As you get better and feel stronger, it is important that you increase the time you spend exercising every day.
- Plan ahead and spread your tasks throughout the week rather than doing them all in one day. Try to avoid having two busy days together.
- Alongside the above exercises, please increase your cardiovascular exercises daily- by walking, or doing any activity which raises your heart rate.
- Please keep in line with government guidelines regarding social distancing and social isolation at this time.
- If you are concerned regarding your recovery, or need further guidance, please contact your GP, or go to the NHS 111 Online Service at 111.nhs.uk (or call 111 if unable to get help online).

Psychological impact of illness

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

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

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

Anxiety

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

Common signs of anxiety include:

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

Depression and low mood

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

Common symptoms include:

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

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

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

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

Apps supporting self-care and managing anxiety

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

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

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

Nutrition

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

Discharge home

You may be seen at home by members of the multidisciplinary team (MDT). Members of this team will often include doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and social workers who have been taking care of you during your recovery.

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

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

Supporting your recovery after COVID-19

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

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

Helpful links

- **Supporting your recovery**
www.covidpatientsupport.lthtr.nhs.uk
A comprehensive guide with information to help with all aspects of your recovery including information on managing fatigue, breathlessness, swallowing, appetite, and nutrition. Lancashire teaching hospital.
- **Every mind matters**
www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters
Tips to help if you are worried about coronavirus.
- **British Lung Foundation**
www.blf.org.uk
What you need to know about COVID-19 if you live with a lung condition.
- **Gov UK**
www.gov.uk/coronavirus
Up-to-date advice public safety restrictions and advice.
- **Managing breathlessness**
www.bit.ly/3bJttrt
A leaflet on coping with breathlessness and positions that may help with breathing.
- **Energy conservation**
www.bit.ly/39s2sa8
A leaflet on finding ways to conserve energy whilst experiencing or recovering from lung conditions.
- **British Laryngological Association website**
www.britishlaryngological.org
For people experiencing voice problems following their illness.

Connection

0300 123 5440

A 24/7 helpline for all ages for people struggling to cope or in a mental health crisis.

