

Covid – 19 – What is it?

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. Coronaviruses are a group of related viruses that cause diseases in mammals and birds. In humans, coronaviruses cause respiratory tract infections as well as other symptoms, which can vary from mild to severe.

How does it affect people?

Most people infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness.

The most common symptoms are a high fever (a temperature above 37.8°C) and a continuous dry cough. Other documented symptoms include: Tiredness, sputum production, shortness of breath, aching of joints and muscles, sore throat, headaches and a change in taste and smell. There does not appear to be any particular reason why people get specific symptoms or in what order.

The shortness of breath is thought to be due to the impact the virus has on the respiratory system (the airways and the lungs). As the virus spreads it can affect the alveoli in the lungs (the small air pockets) which impacts the body's ability to pass oxygen into the blood vessels. If this continues then oxygen support may be required. Sometimes this can lead to the person with the virus requiring being artificially made to sleep and placed on an oxygen machine or artificial ventilation.

Up to 25% of hospitalised Covid-19 patients will need to be in intensive care, often for prolonged periods. Most of them (67%) will have acute respiratory distress syndrome. Ongoing rehabilitation will be essential for many Covid-19 survivors. Many patients will be left with scarring on their lungs. Many more may experience breathlessness, high levels of fatigue and have significant muscle

deconditioning and loss of strength. People with pre-existing long term conditions will be more severely affected, and their rehab needs may be more complex.

How physiotherapy can manage symptoms/ aid recovery

Many people will find that after being unwell for any period of time, they feel weaker and tire more easily. Physiotherapy can help in building up muscle strength again in a way and in a time that is best suited to the person. Physiotherapy looks at all muscles, not just the obvious ones, including the muscles of the lungs. These muscles may be severely affected by the illness and may need special exercises to assist with the feeling of breathlessness post illness. Specialist respiratory physiotherapy looks at regaining the strength of the lung muscles as well as expanding the lungs to maintain the stretchy nature of the lung tissue.

Respiratory physiotherapy along side 'normal' physiotherapy will assist a person in returning to their normal levels of function and help someone reach their full potential.

How can you manage your symptoms and aid recovery?

Managing Breathlessness

People with lung problems may often feel short of breath. Daily tasks such as walking, getting dressed or doing jobs around the house, could make them feel breathless. Being breathless can make you panic or feel frightened. The positions below should help to ease the feeling of breathlessness and therefore the feeling of being frightened.

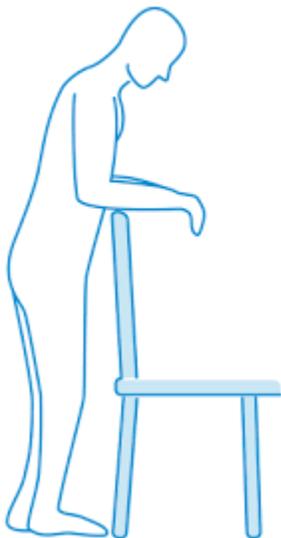
Sitting Upright

Sitting Upright Sit upright against the back of a firm chair. Rest your arms on the chair arms or on your thighs. Make your wrists and hands go limp.



Forward Lean Sitting

Sitting leaning forward at a table Sit leaning forward with your elbows resting on a table. You can also put a few pillows or cushions on the table to rest your head on.



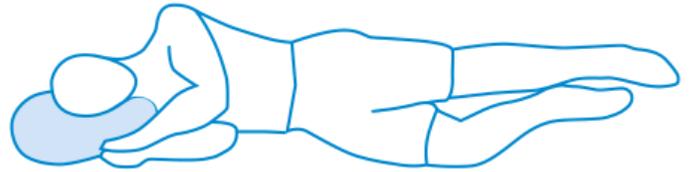
Stand leaning forward

lean from the hips, with your forearms resting on something at the right height, such as a chair or kitchen work surface.

When you're out and about, you could lean on a walking stick or a frame with wheels. If you're shopping, use your supermarket trolley.

High side lying

Lie on your side, with a few pillows under your head and shoulders. Some people like to use a foam wedge instead. A pillow between your waist and armpit can stop you sliding down the bed. Make sure the top pillow supports your head and neck. Your knees and hips should be slightly bent.



Conserve Energy

People suffering with breathlessness will often say that they get breathless very quickly whilst doing activities. Learning to pace activities correctly will help to avoid getting breathless in the first place so you can do more in the long run. Little and often is a great rule!

The Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Respiratory Care have great advice on this:

- Plan ahead
- Avoid the Boom-Bust Cycle
- Sit during tasks and activities
- Pace yourself

Plan ahead

- Spread heavy and light tasks throughout the day. This allows you to recover your energy after a heavier task. Do the heavy tasks when you are at your

best in the day. For example, if you have more energy in the morning, do your biggest or hardest tasks then.

- Gather all the items you need for a given job; for example, your clothes before starting to get dressed. Then take a rest before starting the task. This allows you to recover your energy so you have some left to do the task.

Avoid the Boom-Bust Cycle

- **Boom:** On a good day you have more energy, therefore it is tempting to do all the jobs or activities that you have been wanting to do. If you do this, you may do more than your body is used to. As a result you can experience fatigue and tiredness and feel more short of breath.
- **Bust:** You have done too much and now have no energy. To recover from this 'bust' phase you are forced to rest, sometimes even for a few days. After a few days rest, you feel better and start the over-activity again and so this harmful cycle goes on.

Try not to 'Boom' or 'Bust' by pacing your activities and doing little and often even if you think you are having a good day. Before long you will be having more good days and will feel able to do a little bit more every day.

Sit during tasks and activities

Sitting uses less energy than standing so when possible, try to sit. For example, try sitting in the bathroom when washing or drying yourself. Having a seat in the shower can be helpful. Sitting down to prepare vegetables for a meal can also help you to save your energy.

Pace Yourself

Pacing yourself is all about energy conservation – finding the easiest way to do what you have to do so that you have a little energy left over at the end to do something you want to do.

It is the opposite of the 'Boom' and 'Bust' Cycle. For example: finding the most energy efficient way of getting washed and dressed in the morning so you can do some exercise afterwards. This will help to make you stronger and be able to do all those tasks easier in the long run.

Keeping to a moderate, steady pace during tasks and activity allows you to be most productive. For example, don't rush to get to the top of the stairs, pace yourself to leave some breath for when you get to the top.

Some helpful tips are:

- Avoid fatigue
- Get enough rest
- Do not wait until you are tired before you stop and rest
- Try to have a rest or lie down for a short time in the afternoon to recover some of the energy used during morning activities
- Avoid hurrying or rushing
- Avoid large meals
- Avoid activities for 1 hour after meals

Nutrition and Hydration

People with poor nutrition and hydration may have a deficit of energy, protein, vitamins, or minerals, and this has a negative impact on the body. Malnutrition can start in just a matter of days or weeks of not getting the right food intake. People who are malnourished are at greater risk of weakness, poor endurance

and higher fatigue levels. Poor hydration can add to the feeling of fatigue as well as dizziness and confusion.

It is really important that on returning home after being in hospital or after being unwell, you follow any advice given to you regarding food and water intake. General advice is to eat a balanced diet and drink water throughout the day. Little and often may be best if you have a small appetite.

We hope this information goes some way towards aiding your recovery post Covid-19. If we can help further at all please do contact us.