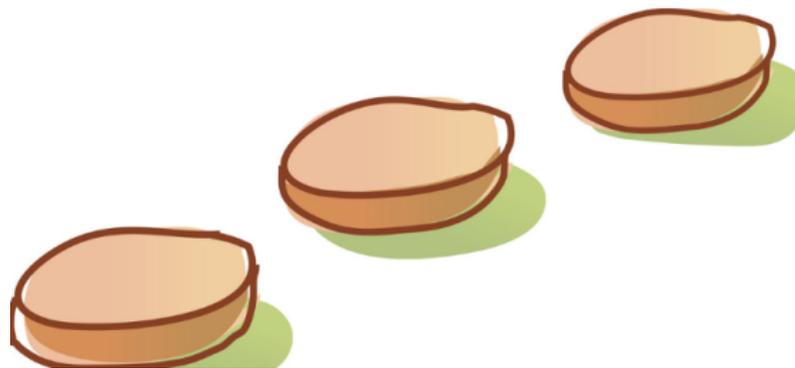


# RECOVERY AFTER COVID-19

## Supporting Your Breathing, Your Body and Pacing Yourself.

This booklet can help you with things that we often see after having a bad illness. You can use this for to help you get better after COVID-19.

If you need further info or help, please contact the team that have been visiting you at home.



**Problems You May Have During and After Illness**

Each

person might be affected by COVID-19 in different ways. Below, we have listed some of the problems that we have seen often. This can happen during, or after the illness.

Some people get better quickly and do not need much help. Others will need more time and help to get better.

- Muscle weakness – Being unwell often means you are staying in bed or resting more. This can make your muscle weak and normal tasks will be harder to do.
- Reduced mobility – This can put you at risk of having lower fitness levels. This can impact how far you can walk and how much you can do each day.
- Being short of breath (Breathlessness) – This happens to many people with this illness. If you had been to hospital it is likely that you may have become short of breath as your lungs work harder to send oxygen to your body. This may mean that you breathe faster and not as deep. Some people feel worried as simple daily tasks become harder.
- Phlegm (mucous) – Most people have phlegm each day and clear it without knowing. With COVID-19 you may have a dry cough, but some people have more phlegm as their illness goes on. Clearing this phlegm is important as it will help your oxygen levels and make breathing easier. If this is an issue, we can give more info to help.
- Being tired – Being unwell with this illness may leave you feeling very tired. You may also feel tired while your body is trying to get better. You may feel you need to sleep more or feel very tired after only taking a short walk.
- Weight loss – You might find that how much food you eat has been affected by your illness. You may not want to eat much, lost weight or find that it is hard to put weight back on. Please ask for the **COVID-19 Nutrition** leaflets to support you.

#### Tips for Dealing with Shortness of Breath.

- Stop (speaking and moving). Give yourself time to get your breath back.
- Position: Sit, stand or lie down in a way which will make it easier for you to breathe.
- Relax or distract (it may help to focus on a picture, a view from the window).
- Use breathing methods (examples below).
- Keeping a window open (if weather allows) can help give a good air flow that can help the feeling of shortness of breath.
- Cooling the face such (like around the nose), can help reduce how breathless you feel. Try wiping a cool wet flannel on your nose and upper cheeks of your face.
- The use of a fan can help reduce your shortness of breath. You should not do this at the moment due to the spread of COVID-19.

## Positions to Ease Shortness of Breath.

These may help you to get your breath back. With all positions, try to relax the hands, wrists, shoulders, neck and jaw as much as you can. Try the different positions and find what works best for you.



## Resting Positions



Make sure you are fully over on your side. Resting your upper arm on a pillow may also help. Relax down onto the pillows as much as you can. Having your legs apart may also help

Sit upright in a comfortable armchair with both arms resting on the chair arms or cushions. Let your shoulders drop and relax. Rest the soles of your feet on the floor.



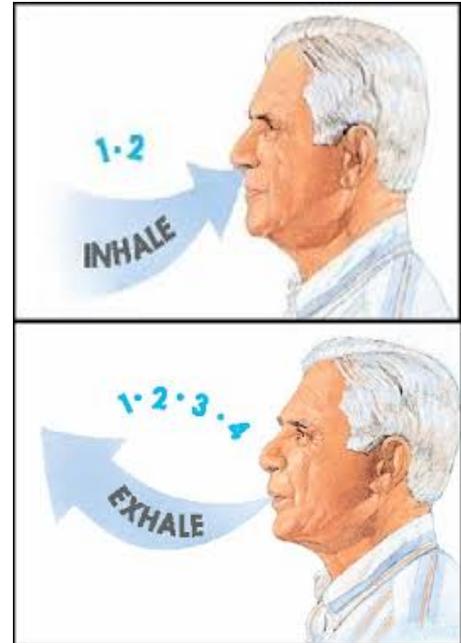
## Breathing Controls

### Narrow Lip Breathing

This can slow down your breathing, help release trapped air in your lungs. This can also help you relax and reduce shortness of breath.

To practice this method, relax your shoulders and upper body and breathe in slowly through your nose to the count of two.

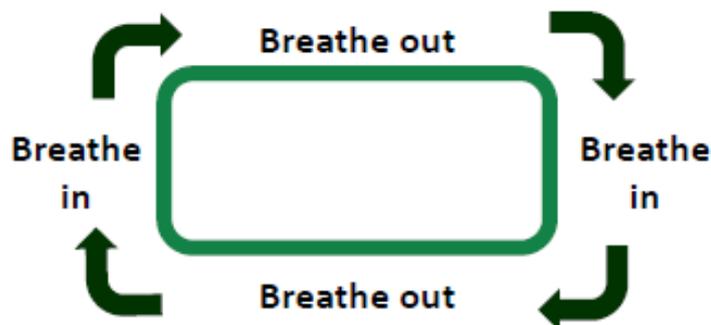
Then close your lips a little, as if you're whistling, breathe out slowly through your mouth with the aim of counting to four.



Some people may find that breathing in and out for the same time will be enough for them.

### Breathe a Rectangle

Look around for a rectangle. This might be a window, a door, picture, or even a book or television screen. Now follow the sides of the rectangle with your eyes as you breathe.



Gently slow the speed that your eyes move round the rectangle, stopping at the corners to help slow your breathing.

Closing your eyes may help you focus on breathing and relax. Relax the shoulders and neck muscles and try not to hold your belly in. Let your hands and arms relax and feel heavy as you breathe out.

## Diaphragmatic or abdominal breathing

This breathing method is done by using the diaphragm muscle to breathe - This is the muscle at the bottom of your lungs that makes you breathe. This muscle pushes down towards your stomach, causing the belly to expand as air enters the lungs. This can help you breathe in a good pattern. This can also help you relax and help your diaphragm get stronger.

1. *Start by placing one hand on your chest and the other hand on your belly.*
2. *Take a breath in through your nose for 2 seconds, feeling your stomach move outward – you are doing it right if your belly moves more than your chest.*
3. *Close your lips a little bit and breath out slowly for four seconds, pressing lightly on your belly.*
4. *Repeat the exercise for 10 'good' breaths.*
5. *Repeat up to 10 times a day.*



## Fatigue, Energy Levels and Increasing Activity at Home

During this illness most people move about less than normal. A lot of bed rest or sitting can lead to muscle loss. This can result in weakness, joint stiffness, muscle tightness and reduced fitness.

This is normal, however it is important to rebuild muscles as soon as possible after illness. Being active helps people get better both in their body and their mind. If you would like more support with your activity levels and exercise, please ask for the **Recovery after COVID-19 Exercise Handbook**.

There are important things to remember before doing more activities or exercising. Many patients who have been unwell found that they could no longer do some tasks without feeling tired.

This could lead to them becoming more inactive. They may try to catch up on jobs when they have a good day. This could however make them feel very tired and need to rest for a few days – they might have done too much! This can make you feel annoyed with yourself and like you are not getting better. ‘Pacing’ is a way to manage this.

### Pacing

“A way of raising your activity level without making you too tired”

Aim: to keep an even level of activity during the day. Try to avoid doing as much as possible in the morning and then resting all afternoon.

#### *Work out what you can do now*

- Choose your starting point – how much of your activity can you do on a good day and a bad day.
- This may take a few tries to get right.
- DO NOT compare yourself to others or what you think you should be able to do. This might be thinking that you should be able to walk to the kitchen or go upstairs without getting short of breath. Be gentle on yourself and follow the steps of pacing.

### *Build-up slowly*

- Doing too much too soon will make you overdo things. This can make you tired for longer.
- Build up the task slowly and at a steady rate. This might be adding one more activity every other day. Find what works well for you, no matter how small the task or build-up is.

### *Write your plan down and record how you do*

- Write down your plan and how you get on (maybe in a diary).
- This will help you see how well you are doing or if you are slipping back.
- It is difficult to remember things each day. You can also write down how you feel each day.

### *Pacing Methods*

- Breaking tasks down into smaller bits.
- Take short breaks often.
- Do something for a set time. This makes it easier to plan your day. This can also stop you from doing too much too soon.
- 'Taking a break' does not mean fully stopping – so don't be hard on yourself. Change your position or do something else for a little bit. Having a rest might let you return to the task later and do a little bit more.
- Think about taking a rest before you feel you need it. This can be tricky, but try to rest before you get too breathless, tired or feel pain.

### *Slowly increase how much you do*

- You may feel like you are going backwards, and tasks can take longer.
- Slowly build up the amount you do by a set amount.
- Do not be tempted to try to do more on a 'good day' - stick to pacing levels.

At the time of reading this the government may still be asking you to self-isolate. This should not stop you from exercising safely at home. It might feel hard to motivate yourself.

It is important to remember that walking around your house and using the stairs is also great exercise.

*Ideas for exercising at home*

- Walk across or around the biggest room or hallway
- Step ups – on and off bottom step – side step ups
- Full flight of stairs
- Walk a lap of the house downstairs and/or upstairs – include the garden if this is safe to access

*Additional advice*

- Avoid holding your breath during activities, i.e. climbing stairs or bending.
- ‘Blow as you go’ - breathe out on effort, i.e. blow out when bending, lifting, reaching or standing up from a chair.
- Avoid rushing. Breathless people sometimes rush as they wrongly believe if they move quicker, they will be less breathless when they get there.
- Pace your breathing so you breathe in for 1 step and then breathe out for 2 steps when walking or climbing the stairs.