

Service information guide

## Life After Lock-Down

A guide to help you get back on your feet



This booklet has been developed to help you if you have been unwell or shielded during COVID-19.

Due to coronavirus, we have all been spending more time within our homes; we might have been doing less activity than usual and might not be feeling our normal selves.

This guide can support you to help yourself and get back on your feet.

# Managing Fatigue

## What is fatigue?

**Physically:** Fatigue is a profound lack of energy, feelings of muscle weakness, slowed movements or slow reactions.

**Mentally:** Fatigue can be experienced as exhaustion. Persistent fatigue can cause a lack of mental clarity, difficulty concentrating and memory loss.

You may experience both or either of these types of fatigue.

## Why might I feel fatigued?

Fatigue is a normal bodily response to fighting an infection, such as COVID-19.

Fatigue can also be experienced when you attempt to return to your normal daily activities following a sustained period of reduced activity, such as self-shielding.

## How can I best manage my fatigue?

Fatigue management involves some basic principles that may seem like common sense, however, not everyone follows them!

Managing fatigue involves using short periods of **rest and relaxation** alongside periods of **activity**. It is vital to avoid the 'Boom and Bust' approach – when you do as much as you can in one go and then feel exhausted for the rest of the day.

## **Keeping an Active Mind**

During lock-down, your memory and mind might not have been challenged as much as normal. Challenging mental activities have been shown to help stimulate the formation of nerve cell connections within the brain and may encourage new cell generation.

### **What can I do to keep my mind active?**

- Complete crosswords, word searches or sudoku
- Read the paper or a book
- Talk regularly to family and friends
- Return to your usual hobbies

### **What should I do if I'm feeling more forgetful?**

- Try making lists or keeping a diary – this can help avoid the need to store tasks or information in your brain for prolonged periods of time
- Try to stick to a regular routine
- Ensure you are getting sufficient rest - fatigue and tiredness can impact on your cognitive abilities

If you feel you need further advice regarding healthy eating or your memory, please liaise with a visiting health professional or your GP.

## Healthy Eating

Good nutrition is an important part of leading a healthy lifestyle. Your diet can help you to reach and maintain a healthy weight, reduce your risk of chronic diseases and give you the energy to help you complete your day to day tasks and activities.

Try to stick to regular mealtimes and eat a balanced diet. 'My Healthy Plate' is a good example of a well-balanced meal.

### **Nutrition and healthy lifestyle tips:**

- If you are struggling to eat well, try switching to eating smaller meals and frequent snacks
- If you aren't outdoors often, consider taking a vitamin D supplement (10 micrograms per day) to help you to maintain healthy bones and muscles
- Limit your alcohol intake and don't smoke
- Stay hydrated - aiming to drink 6-8 glasses of water each day
- Prioritise your sleep! Sleep is essential; helping you to recover from mental and physical exertion and can help you to be more productive during the day.

**If you are having difficulty getting to the shops to access healthy food, you could consider: shopping online, shopping over the telephone, asking a friend or family member to help out or getting in touch with a local voluntary service.**

You may find it helpful to You may find it helpful to **plan and prioritise** your day to decide;

- What is essential
- What you would enjoy doing with your energy
- What you could leave for another day
- What you could delegate to another person – don't be afraid to ask for help!

Using a diary might help you plan these activities, as well as help you to reflect on where your energy is being spent during the day.

When carrying out your activities and tasks you should consider:

- **Pacing activities** – take rests before you get tired or break up activities into smaller tasks.
- **Organising your environment** – have things near to hand to help you conserve your energy.
- **Your position** – completing a task in sitting rather than standing may help you save energy.

For additional information about fatigue, please visit the Royal College of Occupational Therapists Website:

[https://www.rcot.co.uk/  
recovering-covid-19-post-viral-fatigue-and-conserving-energy](https://www.rcot.co.uk/recovering-covid-19-post-viral-fatigue-and-conserving-energy)

## **Managing Mental Health & Wellbeing**

## **The Emotional Impact of Lockdown**

Going through this strange time will most certainly impact how you are feeling emotionally. This is particularly true if you are recovering from a period of ill health or self-shielding.

### **Many people are feeling the following things:**

- Anxiety – including not wanting to leave the house due to fear of COVID-19 and worrying about the future.
- Low mood – we are not able to do our usual enjoyable activities e.g. go to social groups, the shops or spend time with family. This means that we might naturally feel low in mood.
- Feeling socially isolated – we are not able to get out of the house and see other people so we start to feel lonely.

### **Some common signs of low mood and anxiety include:**

- Poor sleep pattern
- Feelings of worry, stress or anxiety
- Fatigue
- Reduced motivation
- Poor appetite or eating too much
- Wanting to withdraw from others

## **One Leg Stand**

Stand tall, holding the back of a sturdy chair or kitchen sink. Slowly lift one leg back behind you to balance on one leg. Try to keep the supporting knee soft and your posture upright. Hold the position for 10 seconds. Repeat on the other leg.

## **Heel-Toe Stand**

Stand tall, holding the back of a sturdy chair or kitchen sink. Put one foot in front of the other to make a straight line. Keep your posture upright. Hold the position for 10 seconds. Repeat with your feet the other way around.

## **Tips for Exercising Safely:**

- Make sure the chair you use is sturdy and will not move
- Wear supportive shoes during exercise
- Gradually build up the amount of exercise you are doing
- STOP exercising immediately and contact your GP or 111 if you experience chest pain, new or severe pain, dizziness or severe shortness of breath when completing exercise

If you feel you need further advice regarding exercise or reducing falls, please liaise with a visiting health professional or your GP.

## Exercise & Reducing Your Risk of Falls

Exercise can help you to manage your physical and mental well-being and can help to reduce your risk of falls. Your daily exercise could include walking to the shops to get the paper, gardening or doing the housework. If you are stuck for ideas, you could try these simple exercises:

**Sit to Stand:** Sit tall near the front of a chair with your feet slightly back. Lean forwards and stand up (with hands on the arms of the chair if needed). Slowly lower yourself back into the chair.

**Heel Raises:** Stand tall, holding the back of a sturdy chair or kitchen sink. Lift your heels off the floor, taking your weight onto your toes. Hold for three seconds, then lower with control.

**Toe Raises:** Stand tall, holding the back of a sturdy chair or kitchen sink. Raise your toes off the floor, taking your weight onto your heels. Don't stick your bottom out. Hold for three seconds, then return to the starting position with control.

If you recognise these signs, it may be time to look after your emotional health. This is called "self-care".

## Self-care: Help with Loneliness and Boredom

- **Stick to a routine** – when you are not going out it can be easy to get out of a routine e.g. staying in your pyjamas or in bed most the day. Have a set time to get out of bed, get dressed as if you were leaving the house. Plan nice things to do throughout the day.
- **Regular exercise** – try to do regular exercise during the day; inside and outside of your house if possible. Please see the exercise section for further advice regarding this.
- **Call family and friends regularly** – they might be feeling lonely as well. You could do this by simply ringing them or if you have a smart phone you could try a video call. Seeing someone, even if it is just over the phone, can be greatly beneficial.

## Self-care: Relaxation Exercises and Mindfulness

Simple **breathing control and mental imagery** exercises can help you to relax and put you in control of your emotions. Please see the “Managing Breathlessness” section of this booklet for further details.

Apps (accessed on smart phone or tablet) are also a great way to access mindfulness resources, try out one of these free Apps: **Calm**, **Headspace** or **Smiling Mind**.

# Managing Breathlessness

## Why might I feel breathless?

There are many different causes of breathlessness. You might feel more breathless than you used to before lock-down.

Sustained periods of reduced activity, whether in hospital or at home, can mean that your muscles may become weaker and therefore are not as ready to respond to exertion. This weakness can contribute towards feelings of breathlessness.

## How can I manage my breathlessness?

Try out these tips and exercises to see what works for you:

### **Breathlessness Tips:**

#### **Time your breathing with exercise or activity**

If you are doing an activity or exercise that makes you feel breathless, try breathing in before you make the effort, then breathe out during the effort. E.g. when doing the stairs, take a breath in before stepping up, then blow out as you step up.

#### **Pursed Lip Breathing**

This technique can help splint open your airway to make breathing easier. The technique: Breathe in gently through your nose. Purse your lips like you're going to blow out a candle. Then slowly breathe out through your pursed lips.

## Breathing Control

These exercises can be completed in a few seconds, no matter where you are. They can be particularly helpful when you feel breathless, during a stressful time or can be used as part of your daily routine.

1. Lie comfortably on your back with a pillow under your head and knees. Place one hand on your stomach, with the other hand relaxed by your side.
2. Gently close your mouth, lips together and keep your jaw loose.
3. Breathe in gently through your nose, feeling your tummy rise and expand 'like a balloon' as you breathe in. The breath should be unforced and silent.
4. Breathe out lightly through your nose if possible, without pushing, keeping your stomach relaxed.
5. Make sure you relax and pause at the end of each breath out.
6. When you breathe in, your upper chest should be relaxed and not moving. From time to time place your hand on your upper chest to check this.
7. As you repeat this sequence be aware of any areas of tension in your body and concentrate on 'letting go', particularly jaw, neck, shoulders and hands.

You need to practise as often as you can. Try little and often, e.g. three minutes every hour. Progress to practising whilst sitting, then standing and finally walking.

**If you feel you need further advice regarding your breathlessness, please liaise with a visiting health professional or your GP.**



# Get in touch

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