

# Supporting Your Recovery from COVID-19

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# Supporting Your Recovery from COVID-19

Recovering from COVID-19 is different for everyone. It does not matter how old you are or how healthy you were before you got COVID-19. Some people feel better in a few weeks. For others, it may take months.

This guide gives important information about recovering from COVID-19.

Some topics in this guide may not apply to you. Focus on the topics that are relevant to you.

If you have questions, talk with your primary health care provider or another health care provider who can help with your specific concern(s).

It may help to share this guide with your family and friends, so they can help support you as you recover.

## What if I have shortness of breath (feeling out of breath)?

It is common to feel out of breath more easily after having COVID-19 and being in the hospital. Staying calm and learning the best way to manage your shortness of breath will help. Shortness of breath should get better as you use the positions or strategies listed in this guide, and slowly start to be more active.

### **Call 911 if you have any of the following:**

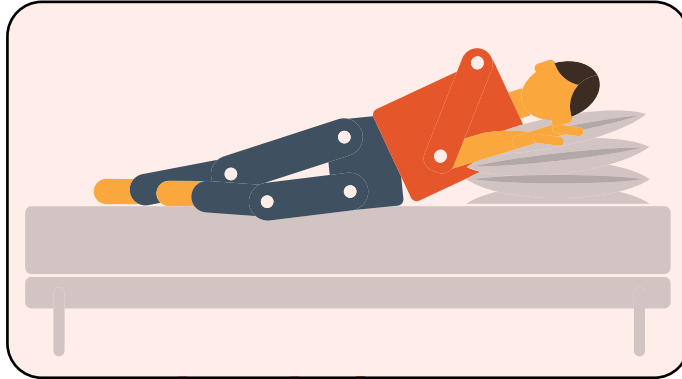
- › Struggling for each breath
- › Only able to say 1 word at a time
- › Severe (very bad) chest pain
- › Hard time waking up
- › Confusion
- › Loss of consciousness

**Call your primary health care provider or 811 if you feel short of breath (have trouble catching your breath) and it does not get better with the positions or strategies listed in this guide.**

## What positions may help with my shortness of breath?

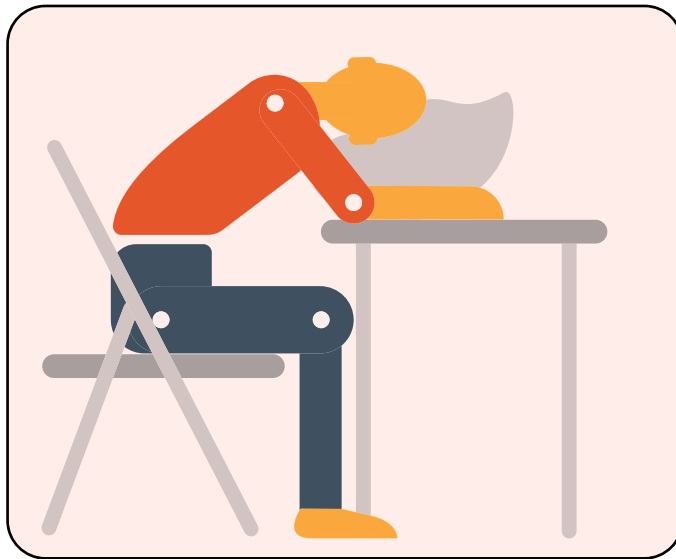
These positions may help you feel less short of breath. Try each one to see which helps.

### 1. High (raised) side lying



- Lie on your side. Place pillows under your body to support your head and neck. Slightly bend your knees.

### 2. Forward lean sitting with table



- Sit in front of a table with a pillow on it. Lean forward from your waist. Rest your head and neck on the pillow. Rest your arms on the table.

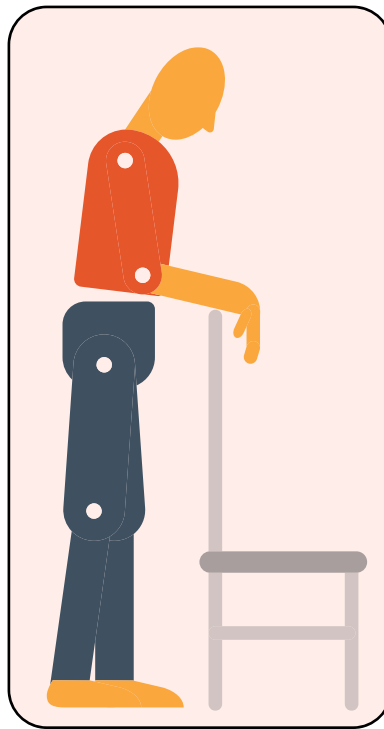
**Note:** You can also try this without a pillow.

### 3. Forward lean sitting without table



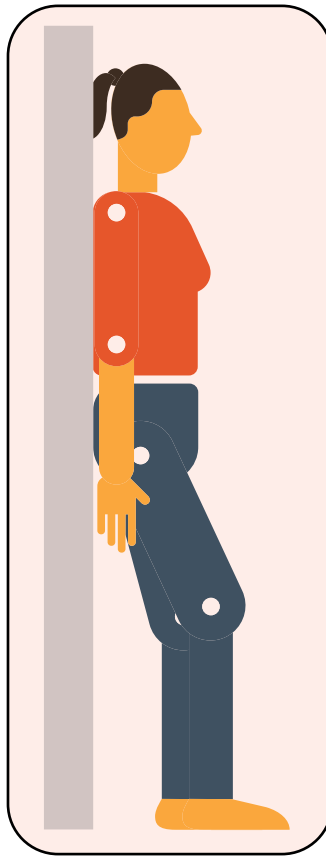
- Sit in a chair. Lean forward to rest your arms on your lap or the armrests of the chair.

### 4. Forward lean standing



- Stand up straight. Then lean forward onto a stable surface (such as a windowsill or table).

## 5. Standing with back support



- Stand with your back towards a wall and your hands by your sides. Place your feet about 1 foot away from the wall and slightly apart. Then lean against the wall.

## What strategies may help with my shortness of breath?

### Relaxed breathing

This can help you to relax and get control of your breathing.

- Sit in a comfortable and supported position.
- Put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach (belly).
- If it helps you to relax, you can close your eyes. If it does not help you to relax, keep them open and focus on your breathing.
- Slowly breathe in through your nose (or your mouth, if you are not able to breathe through your nose). Then breathe out through your mouth.
- As you breathe, you should feel the hand on your stomach rise more than the hand on your chest.
- Try to use as little effort as possible. Keep your breaths slow, relaxed, and smooth.

## Controlled coughing

Coughing is common after having COVID-19. Coughing is how your body tries to get rid of mucus (thick fluid lining the nose, mouth, and entryway to the lungs). Coughing you cannot control can make you feel worse. It causes your airways to close, traps mucus in your lungs, and can make you feel very tired.

There are things you can do to try to control your cough so that you feel better. If your cough is making you feel breathless and you have wheezing (a high-pitched whistling sound), your health care provider may prescribe medication to help.

Controlled coughing may also help. Controlled coughing comes from deep in your lungs. It loosens mucus and moves it through your airways. **If you have been prescribed an inhaler or medication to help your cough, take it before trying controlled coughing.**

### How to do controlled coughing:

- Sit on the edge of a chair with both feet flat on the floor.
- Lean forward a little and relax.
- As you inhale (breathe in) slowly through your nose, fold your arms over your stomach.
- As you exhale (breathe out) through your mouth, lean forward. Push your arms against your stomach.
- Cough 2 or 3 times as you exhale with your mouth slightly open. Make the coughs short and sharp. Gently push on your stomach with your arms as you cough. The first cough brings mucus through your lungs. The next coughs bring it up and out.
- Inhale again, slowly and gently through your nose. **Do not take quick or deep breaths through your mouth.** This can block the mucus coming out of your lungs. It also can cause uncontrolled coughing.
- Rest, and repeat as needed.

## When can I start exercising?

**If you are on oxygen, you MUST talk with a health care provider about using oxygen while exercising before you start.**

Once you return home, give yourself time to get settled and rest for 2 to 3 weeks. This may include light activities such as showering, making meals, light chores (like doing the dishes or folding laundry), gentle stretching, and breathing exercises.

It is important to monitor your symptoms, including breathlessness and fatigue (feeling very tired). If you are still struggling with basic tasks (like getting dressed or having a shower), it may be too soon to start doing exercises like strengthening exercises or aerobic activities. **Exercising while recovering from COVID-19 can make you feel very tired or feel worse. Some people may have to wait 1 or 2 months before they start to exercise.**

When you feel ready to start exercising, slowly increase your exercise over time. Be careful and pace yourself. Start with low-intensity exercise (like walking) for 5 to 10 minutes. You may have to start with less than 5 minutes — this is OK. Do not expect to be able to do as much as you did before having COVID-19.

### Remember

- Everyone's recovery is different.
- Listen to your body and notice how you feel for 24 to 48 hours (1 to 2 days) after you exercise. If you are exhausted (very tired), you may be doing too much.
- Be kind to yourself during your recovery. It may take several weeks to get back to your regular activities.
- Talk to your primary health care provider if you start to have symptoms related to COVID-19 (see bottom of page 7) when you start to be more active.
- If you are struggling to get back to how active you were before you had COVID-19, a personal exercise plan created by a physiotherapist or other qualified health care provider may help (see page 26).

Exercising after COVID-19 can help you:

- › Improve fitness
- › Lower stress
- › Lower breathlessness
- › Improve your mood
- › Improve muscle strength
- › Improve confidence
- › Improve balance and coordination
- › Improve your energy and manage fatigue
- › Improve thinking



**Your safety is important**, especially if you:

- › had trouble with moving before going to the hospital.
- › had any falls before going to the hospital or while you were in the hospital.
- › have another health condition or an injury (such as heart disease, a previous sports injury, etc.) that may put your health at risk while exercising.
- › have been discharged from the hospital with prescribed oxygen.

In these cases, talk with your primary health care provider or a physiotherapist to make a safe exercise plan. You may also want to have someone with you when you exercise.

**To exercise safely:**

- Wear loose, comfortable clothing and supportive shoes.
- Wait at least 1 hour after a meal before exercising.
- Always warm up before (see page 8) and cool down after (see page 12) exercising.
- Drink water during and after exercising.
- **Do not exercise in very hot weather.**
- Exercise indoors in very cold weather.
- Follow physical distancing rules when exercising.

**If you have any of the following symptoms, stop exercising or do not exercise, and call your primary health care provider:**

- › Nausea (feeling sick to your stomach)
- › Dizziness or lightheadedness
- › Severe shortness of breath
- › Clamminess (dampness) or excessive (a lot of) sweating
- › Tightness in your chest
- › More pain

**If you cannot reach your primary health care provider, go to the nearest Emergency Department right away.**

## How will I know if I am exercising at the right level?

Start exercising at a light to moderate intensity (how hard your body is working) level. To find out if you are exercising at the right level, take the Talk Test:

- › If you can say a whole sentence without stopping and do not feel breathless, you may be able to exercise harder.
- › If you cannot talk at all, or can only say 1 word at a time and are severely breathless, you are exercising too hard.
- › If you can say a sentence, pausing once or twice to catch your breath, and are moderately breathless, you are exercising at the right level.

**It is normal to feel a little breathless when you exercise. This is OK. Slowly building your fitness over time can help you become less breathless.**

To improve your fitness, you should feel moderately breathless when you exercise. If you feel too breathless to talk, slow down or stop to rest until your breathing feels more controlled.

## How can I warm up safely?

Warming up gets your body ready for exercise to prevent injury.

- You should warm up for about 5 minutes. At the end of your warm-up, you should feel slightly breathless.
  - Warm-up exercises can be done while sitting or standing. If you warm up while standing, hold on to a stable surface for support, if needed.
  - Repeat each movement 2 to 4 times.
1. **Shoulder shrugs:** Slowly lift your shoulders up towards your ears, then lower.
  2. **Shoulder circles:** Keep your arms relaxed by your sides or resting on your lap. Slowly move your shoulders in a circle forwards, and then backwards.
  3. **Knee lifts:** Lift 1 knee up slowly, no higher than your hip, then lower. Repeat with the other knee.
  4. **Ankle circles:** With 1 foot, draw circles with your toes. Repeat with the other foot.

## How can I do aerobic (cardio) exercises safely?

When you are ready, you may choose to slowly start aerobic exercise. Aerobic exercise is done for longer periods of time at less intensity. This allows your heart rate to rise and improves blood circulation to your heart and muscles. This can be any activity that makes you feel slightly to moderately breathless.

Start with low-intensity exercise (like walking) for short periods of time (about 5 to 10 minutes, 2 to 3 times a day).

The goal is to slowly build up to how active you were before you had COVID-19. Over time, work towards getting 30 minutes of moderate intensity exercise, 5 days a week.

Time your aerobic exercise. Try to slowly add to the amount of time, 30 seconds to 1 minute at a time.

### Examples of aerobic exercise:

#### 1. Marching on the spot

This is a good exercise if you cannot walk outside or you are not able to walk very far before needing to sit down.

- If needed, hold onto a stable chair or surface for support. Have a chair nearby to rest.
- Lift your knees one at a time.

#### To make this exercise harder:

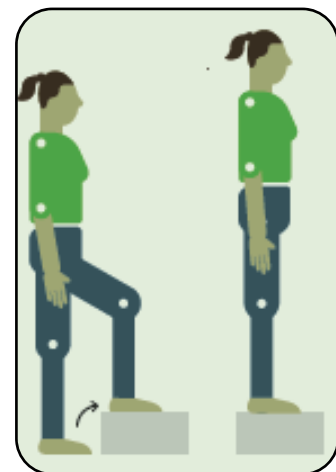
- Raise your legs higher. Try to reach hip height, if possible.



#### 2. Step-ups

This is a good exercise if you cannot walk outside or you are not able to walk very far before needing to sit down.

- Stand at the bottom of a staircase.
- Hold on to the handrail for support, if needed. Have a chair nearby to rest.
- Step up with 1 foot onto the first step. Then step back down. Repeat 10 times with 1 leg.
- Then change to the other leg and repeat 10 times.



#### To make this exercise harder:

- Step higher or faster.
- If you can balance without holding on to the handrail, try holding weights as you step up and down.

### 3. Walking

This is a good exercise if you can exercise outside.

- Use a walker, crutches, or walking stick, if needed.
- Choose a route that is flat.

**To make this exercise harder:**

- Walk faster or farther.
- Try walking uphill.

### 4. Jogging or biking

Jogging or biking may not be right for you. Only jog or bike if your health care provider says that it is OK.

This may be a good exercise if walking does not make you breathless enough or if you were able to do these activities before you had COVID-19.

## What are some strengthening exercises I can do safely?

Strengthening exercises help to make your muscles stronger. They do not make you feel breathless like aerobic exercise does. They will make you feel like your muscles have worked hard.

- Start with 1 session of strengthening exercises your first week. See how you feel for 24 to 48 hours (1 to 2 days) after exercising.
- If you feel exhausted and need a lot of time to catch your breath, you may not be ready to start these exercises.
- Over time, work towards doing 2 to 3 sessions of strengthening exercises each week.
- Start by doing each exercise 10 times. If you can do this easily, work towards 3 sets of 10 repetitions of each exercise, with a short rest between each set.

**Do not worry if you find these exercises hard.** If you do, start with a smaller number of repetitions in each set. Work towards doing a set of 10 repetitions. As the exercises get easier, use heavier weights to make your muscles work harder. Try using cans of food or bottles of water as weights.

These exercises can be done while sitting or standing.

Keep good posture, with your back straight and your stomach tucked in. Do the exercises slowly.

**Remember to breathe in as you get ready to do the hardest part of the exercise, and breathe out as you make the effort.**

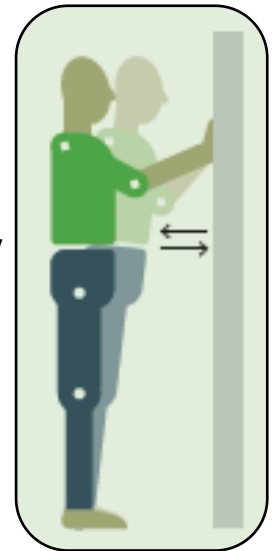
## Arm exercises

### 1. Wall push-off

- Stand facing a wall, with your feet about 1 foot away.
- Place your hands flat against the wall at shoulder height, with your fingers facing upwards.
- **Keeping your body straight at all times**, slowly lower your body towards the wall by bending your elbows. Then, gently push away from the wall until your arms are straight.
- Repeat.

#### To make this exercise harder:

- Stand farther away from the wall.



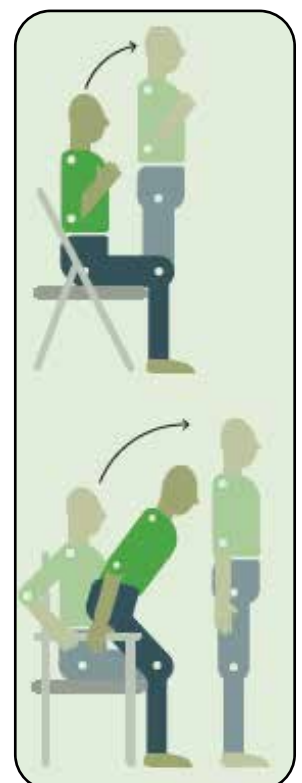
## Leg exercises

### 1. Sit-to-stand

- Sit in a chair with your feet flat on the floor, hip-width apart.
- With your arms by your sides or crossed over your chest, slowly stand up.
- Stay standing for 3 seconds. Then slowly sit back down.
- **Keep your feet flat on the floor the whole time.**
- If you cannot stand up from a chair without using your arms, try a higher chair. If this is still too hard, you may use your arms to help push you up.

#### To make this exercise harder:

- Move as slowly as possible.
- Use a lower chair.
- Hold a weight close to your chest while doing the exercise.



## 2. Squats

- Stand with your back against a wall or other stable surface and your feet hip-width apart.

**Note:** You can also do this exercise by resting your hands on the back of a stable chair.

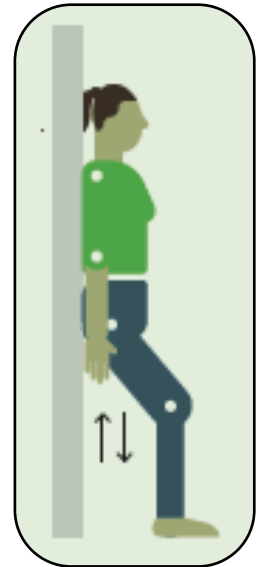
- Move your feet about 1 foot away from the wall.
- Keeping your back against the wall, or holding on to the chair, slowly bend your knees. Your back will slide down the wall.

**Keep your hips higher than your knees.**

- Hold for 1 second. Then slowly straighten your knees.

**To make this exercise harder:**

- Bend your knees more. This will make the squat lower. Remember to keep your hips higher than your knees.
- Hold the squat longer, for up to 3 seconds.

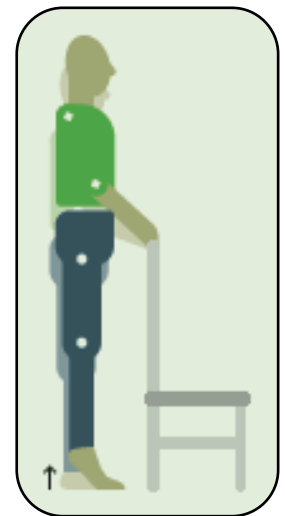


## 3. Heel raises

- Stand in front of a stable surface. Rest your hands on the surface, but do not lean on it. This is only to support your balance.
- With your feet flat on the floor, slowly rise up onto your toes. Then slowly lower back down.

**To make this exercise harder:**

- Stay on your toes for up to 3 seconds.
- Do this exercise while standing on one leg at a time.



## How can I cool down safely?

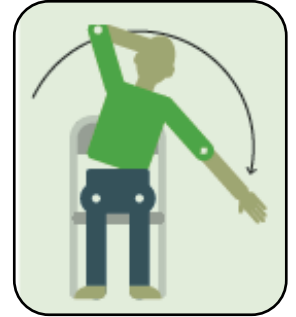
Cool-down exercises help your breathing and heart rate come down slowly, before you stop exercising. Stopping quickly without a cool-down can cause light-headedness, dizziness, and/or fainting.

- You should cool down for about 5 minutes. At the end of your cool-down, your breathing should be back to how it was before you started your exercise session.
  - Repeat each exercise 2 to 4 times.
1. Walk at a slower pace or gently march on the spot, for about 2 minutes.
  2. Repeat the warm-up exercises (see page 8) while sitting or standing.

3. Do stretching exercises as a relaxing way to cool down. These stretches can be done while sitting or standing. Do each stretch gently 2 to 3 times. Hold each stretch for 15 to 20 seconds.

**Side:**

- Reach your right arm up to the ceiling. Then lean slightly to the left. You should feel a stretch along the right side of your body.
- Return to the starting position. Repeat on the other side.



**Back of thigh (hamstring):**

- Sit on the edge of a chair. Keep your back straight and your feet flat on the floor.
- Straighten 1 leg out in front of you with your heel resting on the ground.
- Place your hands on your other thigh for support.
- Sitting as tall as you can, bend slightly forwards at your hips until you feel a slight stretch down the back of the straight leg.
- Return to the starting position. Repeat on the other side.



**Lower leg (calf):**

- Stand facing a stable surface with your feet hip-width apart. Lean towards the stable surface for support.
- Keeping your back straight and your body upright, step 1 leg behind you.
- With both feet facing forwards, bend your front knee. Keep your back leg straight and your heel on the floor. You should feel a stretch in the back of your back leg.
- Return to the starting position. Repeat on the other side.



**Where can I find free exercise classes?**

Primary Health Care offers free online physical activity and exercise classes (such as Mindful Movement, Intro to Cardio, Ready Set Move, and more). Classes are offered by physiotherapists using Zoom for Healthcare. Anyone with a valid Nova Scotia health card can take part.

- › [www.HealthyNS.ca](http://www.HealthyNS.ca)
- › Phone (toll-free): 1-844-460-4555

## What can I do if I still have problems with my voice?

You may have problems with your voice from coughing. This may be worse if you had a breathing tube while you were in the hospital.

If your voice is raspy or weak, it is important to:

- **Keep talking when it is comfortable.** If you get tired while talking, take breaks. Tell others that you need to rest your voice and use other ways of communicating, such as writing, texting, or using gestures.
- **Take breaks.** If you run out of breath while talking, stop and sit calmly while focusing on your breathing. Try the breathing strategies on page 4. Do these until you feel ready to talk again.
- **Try humming** to yourself, but be careful not to strain. This will help you practice using your voice.
- **Do not shout or whisper**, as this can strain your vocal cords. If you need to get someone's attention, try making noise with an object. Avoid talking with background noise.
- **Sip water throughout the day** to help keep your vocal cords well hydrated (have enough fluids).

If your voice has not returned to normal within 6 to 8 weeks (1.5 to 2 months), talk with your primary health care provider. Voice problems caused by a breathing tube may last longer.

## What can I do to help with eating, drinking, and swallowing problems?

If you were on a ventilator (machine to help you breathe) and had a breathing tube while you were in the hospital, you may have trouble swallowing food, drinks, or medications. This is because the muscles that help with swallowing may have become weak. When swallowing muscles are weak, your body has trouble protecting your airway from food, drinks, or saliva (spit).

**It is important to pay attention to your swallowing. This will help you avoid choking and lung infections.** These can happen if food or drink goes into your airway and gets in your lungs when you swallow.

**If you have trouble swallowing:**

- Sit upright whenever you eat or drink. **Never eat or drink while lying down.**
- Stay upright (seated, standing, walking) for at least 30 minutes after meals.
- Some foods are easier to swallow than others. It may help to start with soft, smooth, or moist foods, or to cut up food into very small pieces.



- **Do not eat or drink while watching TV, reading, or talking.** Try to have your meals in a quiet place without distractions.
- Take your time when eating and drinking. Take small bites of food, and chew them well. Take small sips of your drink between bites of food.
- **Make sure your mouth is clear before taking another bite or sip.** If you need to, swallow again.
- Eat when you feel alert and well rested.
- If you get tired after eating a full meal, eat smaller meals throughout the day.
- If you cough or choke, or have trouble breathing when you eat or drink, take a break to recover.

### **It is important to:**

- Eat healthy foods, especially when you are weak or have had a breathing tube. This will help with your recovery.
- Brush your teeth after every meal and stay hydrated. This will help to keep your mouth healthy and lower your risk of infection.

**If you follow all of the safe swallowing tips above and still have any of the following symptoms, talk with your primary health care provider:**

- › Coughing or choking when eating or drinking
- › Your voice sounds wet after eating or drinking
- › Chest infections that are new or happen often
- › Feeling like things are sticking in your throat while eating or drinking

### **What can I do if I have problems with attention, memory, and thinking clearly?**

After having COVID-19, especially if you had a breathing tube while in the hospital, it is common to have trouble with:

- Attention (staying focused)
- Remembering things
- Thinking clearly

Some people describe this as “brain fog” or having foggy, slowed thinking. These problems may go away within weeks or months, or may last longer.

It is important for you and your family to take note of these changes. They can affect your relationships, daily activities, and return to work or school.

If these problems do not get better, talk with your primary health care provider. You may need a referral to an occupational therapist.

### **If you have problems with attention, memory, or thinking clearly:**

- Keep things you use every day (like keys, phone, wallet, or purse) in the same place, so you do not lose them.
- Use an alarm on your phone to help you remember things (like appointments, when to take medication, or to do other daily tasks).
- Write “to do” items on a calendar where they can be easily seen.
- Lower noise and distractions when you need to stay focused (turn off the TV when talking on the phone, ask not to be interrupted while you are making dinner).
- Try to do things you enjoy that get your brain working. Start with easier activities and slowly work up to harder activities. For example, reading, word and number games, or trying a new hobby.
- Break activities down into small steps to avoid feeling overwhelmed.

Other things that can help your brain recover include exercise, relaxation strategies, and getting enough sleep. The exercises in this guide are a good place to start.

### **How can I go back to doing my day-to-day activities safely?**

It is important to return to your day-to-day activities slowly after having COVID-19. This may be hard at first, but it will help you to:

- › recover.
- › prevent you from getting sicker.
- › improve your mood.

If you can only get out of bed and get dressed at first, that is OK. As you start to feel better, try to be more active. This may mean letting others help you with tasks like grocery shopping, taking care of children, or housekeeping.

Remember that everyone returns to their daily activities, including work, school, or taking care of children, at a different pace.

The strategies for managing your energy and fatigue in this guide may help. There may also be adaptive equipment to help you safely do the things you want to do.

## **What are some tools that can help make my day-to-day life easier?**

Adaptive equipment or assistive devices are tools that can help you do things like getting in and out of the tub, making meals, and getting around your home.

These aids can include household items such as a long-handled bath sponge or a cart with wheels for carrying items between rooms.

### **Assistive devices include:**

- Raised toilet seat or toilet safety rails (if you have trouble getting on and off the toilet)
- Bath seat, shower chair, or bench (so you can sit to shower)
- 4-wheel walker (includes a seat to rest if you get tired, saves energy while walking)

Medical equipment stores and local pharmacies often carry these items and may rent equipment short term. If you have private health insurance, check to see if it covers equipment rentals.

Some local groups, such as Lions Clubs, Legion Branches, and Kin Canada clubs, have equipment available to loan to local residents. Check for groups in your area that offer this service.

The Canadian Red Cross has an equipment loan program in many areas of Nova Scotia. Equipment is loaned out for 3 months at no cost (with a referral from a health care provider). Check with your local Red Cross or visit:

› [www.redcross.ca](http://www.redcross.ca)

An occupational therapist or other health care provider can help you figure out what is right for you.

## **How can I manage my energy (cope with fatigue)?**

Fatigue is a feeling of tiredness, exhaustion, or lack of energy.

Fatigue is a normal part of your body's response to fighting a viral infection. It may continue for a while after the infection has cleared. If your fatigue is not better or is getting worse after 3 to 4 weeks, talk with your primary health care provider.

Fatigue can:

- › make you sleep more than usual.
- › make a simple task, such as getting dressed, feel like hard work.
- › make it hard to concentrate or remember things.
- › make you feel more emotional.

Finding ways to manage your energy can help you do the things you want to do.

### How to help with fatigue:

- Set realistic goals for what you plan to do each day based on how you feel.
- Keep a daily routine. Doing things regularly uses less energy and lets you plan how best to use your energy for the day.
- Follow a simple routine and slowly build on it over time. For example:
  - › Get out of bed in the morning.
  - › Wash your face and get dressed.
  - › Eat meals at the table.
  - › Go to bed at a regular time.
- Plan, plan, plan.
  - › Think about the things that you need to do during the week and plan when you will do them.
  - › If you are a morning person, schedule activities you find harder to do in the morning, or when you usually feel your best.
  - › Gather everything you need before you start a task.
- Pace yourself.

Pacing means spreading out activities and including rest breaks so that you do not get overwhelmed.

- › Try a small amount of light activity to start. This will probably be less than you think. Slowly do more each day.
- › Switch between heavy (harder) and light (easier) activities through the day and week.
- › Switch between sitting and standing activities. It takes less energy to sit and uses different muscles than standing.
- › **Do not try to “push through” your fatigue.** Doing too much can cause you to feel more tired or “crash” the next day.
- › Balance activities with rest breaks.

- Listen to your body. Rest before you feel tired.
- Stop and do nothing, calm your mind, or try a relaxation strategy.
- Set priorities. Think about what you need to do, what is important for you to do, and what you can put off for another day.

## **What if I am stressed, anxious, or depressed?**

Being sick can be very stressful and can affect how you feel day to day. It is common to have a wide range of feelings, such as stress, anxiety (worry, fear), or depression (low mood, sadness).

If you were in the hospital, memories or dreams may come to you even if you do not want them to. You may have had thoughts or feelings about dying. You may also feel frustrated about not yet being able to return to your daily activities or routines the way you would like to.

Everyone responds to being sick differently. This is normal — there is no “right” way to respond.

- Do not tell yourself that you “should” feel, think, or do things a certain way.
- Try not to ignore or bottle up your feelings. Give yourself permission to have these feelings until they pass.
- Be patient with the pace of your recovery. Difficult thoughts and feelings can affect your daily activities. This may be worse if you are less motivated because of the difference between what you would like to do and what you are able to do.

Managing stress and feelings of anxiety and depression is an important part of your recovery. Remember to:

### **1. Take care of your basic needs.**

- **Get enough sleep.** Your sleep at home may have been disturbed because of your symptoms, or you may not have been sleeping well if you were in the hospital. Feeling stressed or anxious can also affect your sleep. Sleep helps to lower anxiety and improve your mental health and well-being.
  - › Try to return to a regular sleeping and waking schedule. Create a bedtime routine to tell your body that it is time for sleep.
  - › Create a comfortable sleeping environment. Make sure the room is not too hot or cold, lower noise, and block out light.
  - › Use your bed only for sleeping and sex. Avoid doing activities in bed that keep your mind active, such as using your phone or watching TV.

- › Try a relaxing activity before going to bed, such as taking a bath, doing a relaxation exercise, or listening to calming music.
- › Lower or stop using nicotine (such as from smoking), caffeine, and alcohol.
- › Try to get regular exercise as it can help you get a good night’s sleep. Exercise earlier in the day. Avoid exercising too close to bedtime.
- › Avoid sleeping too much during the day. Naps are OK as you recover. If you have trouble sleeping at night, you may need to nap less during the day.
- › If you cannot sleep or wake up during the night because you are worrying, try scheduling “worry time” earlier in the evening. You can also try writing down your worries so you can think about them in the morning.
- **Eat enough, eat healthy.**
  - › If you struggle with eating or swallowing, see the tips on page 14 or talk with a health care provider.
  - › Family, friends, and caregivers may be able to make sure you have enough food available.
  - › Meal and grocery delivery services may be available in your community. Call 211 to find services in your area.
  - › If needed, call Feed Nova Scotia at 902-457-1900 or call 211 to find your nearest food bank.
- **Try to be as physically active as possible** while not overdoing it. Being active lowers stress and improves your mood. Take small steps to slowly and safely be more active.

## 2. Self-care

- Staying in touch with family and friends is important for your mental well-being. Talking with others can help to lower stress. It may also help you find solutions for challenges in your recovery.
- If you live alone, stay in touch with family and friends online or by phone. Look for support from family and friends who are good listeners. You may also wish to connect with a support group, see the Resources sections on pages 21 to 23.
- When you are feeling low, you may not feel like being social. Tell family and friends that they can help by reaching out to you during your recovery, even if you do not always accept their online meeting invitations or calls right away.
- Try relaxing activities that do not make you too tired, like listening to music, reading, or spiritual practices.

- Relaxed breathing is another example of a relaxation strategy that can help to lower stress. Start slowly and try the “Relaxed breathing” strategies on page 4.
- Slowly do more daily activities or hobbies as you are able. This can help to improve your mood.
- Try not to be hard on yourself if you forget to do something or do not feel better right away. Be compassionate and kind to yourself as you recover.
- Recognize which problems can be solved and which cannot. Break up problems that can be solved into manageable chunks.
- Challenge worries and negative thoughts by asking yourself:
  - › What is the evidence that this thought is true? What is the evidence that this thought is not true?
  - › Is there a more positive, realistic way of looking at the situation?
  - › What is the chance that what I am scared of will actually happen? If the chance is low, what is more likely to happen?
  - › Is this thought helpful? How will worrying help me? How will it hurt me?
  - › What would I say to a friend who had this worry?

If you were receiving mental health support before being in the hospital, talk with your health care provider to make sure that you continue to get this support. Many mental health care providers are offering virtual care options (such as online or on the phone) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Where can I find resources for stress, anxiety, or depression?**

### **Provincial Mental Health and Addictions Crisis Line**

- › Hours: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- › Phone: 902-429-8167
- › Phone (toll-free): 1-888-429-8167

### **Nova Scotia Health Mental Health and Addictions Intake**

- › Hours: Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
- › Phone (toll-free): 1-855-922-1122

### **Wellness Together Canada** (mental health and substance use support)

- › <https://wellnesstogether.ca>
- › Phone (toll-free): 1-866-585-0445 (free, live counselling for adults)
- › Text: WELLNESS to 741741 (support from a trained crisis responder for adults)

## **Hope for Wellness (for Indigenous Peoples)**

- › Phone (toll-free): 1-855-242-3310

## **211 Nova Scotia (for community resources in your area)**

- › <https://ns.211.ca/>
- › Phone: 211

## **Where can I find resources for COVID-19?**

### **Nova Scotia Health: COVID-19 and Access to Mental Health Tools and Information**

- › <https://mha.nshealth.ca/en/coronavirus>

### **Anxiety Canada: Coping With COVID-19**

- › [www.anxietycanada.com/covid-19/](http://www.anxietycanada.com/covid-19/)

### **Centre for Addiction and Mental Health – Mental Health and the COVID-19 Pandemic**

- › [www.camh.ca/covid19](http://www.camh.ca/covid19)

## **What is Long COVID?**

People who have ongoing symptoms months after having COVID-19 are considered to have Long COVID or called “long-haulers”. Research is still being done on Long COVID. There is a lot that we still do not know.

Ongoing symptoms associated with Long COVID can include:

- › Fever
- › Headaches
- › Weakness
- › Fatigue
- › Shortness of breath
- › Muscle and joint pain
- › Chest pain
- › Fast or irregular heartbeat
- › Diarrhea (loose, watery poop)
- › Constipation (not able to poop)
- › Nausea (upset stomach)
- › Vomiting (throwing up)
- › Sore throat
- › Nasal congestion (blocked nose)
- › Cough that does not go away
- › Loss of taste and/or smell
- › Trouble swallowing
- › Changes in vision or hearing
- › Tinnitus (ringing in the ears)
- › Skin rash
- › Trouble with memory and concentration



- › Dizziness
- › Depression
- › Anxiety
- › Trouble sleeping
- › Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- › Brain fog

## **Where can I find support for Long COVID?**

**Note:** Some resources below may not match the advice of your local public health authority. Always follow the health guidelines of your region.

### **COVID Long-Haulers Support Group Canada**

- › <https://covidlonghaulcanada.com/>

### **Long COVID Support**

- › [www.longcovid.org](http://www.longcovid.org)

### **Recovering from COVID-19: Post-viral fatigue and conserving energy**

Royal College of Occupational Therapists (Britain)

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

### **COVID-19: Post-Viral Fatigue Syndrome, Long COVID & Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (M.E.)**

Physios for M.E.

- › [www.physiosforme.com/covid-19](http://www.physiosforme.com/covid-19)

You may also find support groups on social media. Try searching for COVID-19 “Long COVID” or “long-haulers”.

## **When can I go back to work or school?**

Talk with your primary health care provider, employer, or school to help you plan your return to work or school. Many places may offer options for your return to work or school (such as a modified schedule, flexible hours, taking regular breaks, modified job duties, etc.).

### **Government of Canada: The Fundamentals - Return-to-Work Plan**

- › [www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/wellness-inclusion-diversity-public-service/health-wellness-public-servants/disability-management/fundamentals-return-to-work-plan.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/wellness-inclusion-diversity-public-service/health-wellness-public-servants/disability-management/fundamentals-return-to-work-plan.html)

## **What if my symptoms get worse?**

### **Call 911 if you:**

- › Have new or more trouble breathing
- › Have chest pain that is new or gets worse
- › Are confused or cannot think clearly
- › Lose consciousness

**Be sure to tell your health care team you were in the hospital recently for COVID-19.**

### **Call your primary health care provider or go to the nearest walk-in clinic if:**

- › Your symptoms do not get better within 7 to 14 days (1 to 2 weeks).
- › You start getting better and then get worse (such as having more shortness of breath).
- › You think your medication(s) is not working or you are having side effects.
- › You have signs of dehydration (not having enough fluids), such as passing only a small amount of urine (pee), a very dry mouth, or feeling light-headed.

**Be sure to tell your primary health care provider you were in the hospital recently for COVID-19.**

If you do not have a primary health care provider:

### **Need a Family Practice Registry**

- › <https://needafamilypractice.nshealth.ca>
- › Phone: 811

## **Where can I get more information?**

### **COVID-19**

Nova Scotia Health COVID-19 recovery information

- › [www.MyCOVIDRecoveryNS.ca](http://www.MyCOVIDRecoveryNS.ca)

Nova Scotia Health COVID-19 information

- › [www.nshealth.ca/coronavirus](http://www.nshealth.ca/coronavirus)

Nova Scotia COVID-19 information

- › <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus>

Government of Canada COVID-19 information

- › [www.canada.ca/covid19](http://www.canada.ca/covid19)

## **Where can I get help?**

### **Mental Health and Addictions**

Nova Scotia Mental Health and Addictions

- › Phone (toll-free): 1-855-922-1122
- › <https://mha.nshealth.ca>

Provincial Mental Health and Addictions Crisis Line

- › Phone (toll-free): 1-888-429-8167

### **Financial Programs and Services**

Government of Canada COVID-19 Benefits

- › [www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/covid19-emergency-benefits](http://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/covid19-emergency-benefits)

Government of Nova Scotia Financial Help and Social Supports

- › <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/support>

### **Other helpful resources**

Transition House Association of Nova Scotia for women and children experiencing violence and abuse

- › Phone (toll-free): 1-855-225-0220
- › <https://thans.ca>

Department of Community Services Intake Line (to apply for Income Assistance or the Disability Support Program)

- › Phone (toll-free): 1-877-424-1177

PrideHealth – works with members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community to connect with services within the health system and in the community

- › Phone: (902) 487-0470
- › [www.nshealth.ca/content/pridehealth](http://www.nshealth.ca/content/pridehealth)

MyGrief.ca – an online resource to help people work through their grief from the comfort of their own home, at their own pace. Includes links to community resources

- › [www.mygrief.ca](http://www.mygrief.ca)

## **Health and Wellness Programs**

Primary Health Care is offering a variety of free online wellness programs for adults of all ages on healthy eating, physical activity, mental wellness, parenting, and lowering your health risks. Wellness sessions are led by health professionals and are offered using Zoom for Healthcare. Anyone with a valid Nova Scotia health card can participate in these online sessions. To learn more and to register, visit:

- › [www.HealthyNovaScotia.ca](http://www.HealthyNovaScotia.ca)

Nova Scotia Health Patient Guide – Healthy Living, Wellness & Chronic Disease Management

- › <https://library.nshealth.ca/HealthyLiving/Home>

## **Outpatient physiotherapy**

Physiotherapy helps you improve or restore your mobility or function. In Nova Scotia, outpatient physiotherapy is paid for by the provincial health care system and available at your local hospital. You do not need a referral. There is often a waitlist for this service.

**For more information, visit:**

- › [www.nshealth.ca/service-details/physiotherapy](http://www.nshealth.ca/service-details/physiotherapy)

You can also get private physiotherapy by calling your local physiotherapy clinic. You can find a clinic online or by calling 211. You do not need a referral. You must pay for this service. If you have private health insurance, check if it covers physiotherapy.

## **Outpatient occupational therapy**

Occupational therapy helps you improve your ability to do the things that are important to you. This includes daily activities like self-care (getting dressed, bathing, making meals, moving around the house), being productive (going to work or school, parenting, taking part in the community), and leisure. In Nova Scotia, occupational therapy is paid for by the provincial health care system. You can get outpatient therapy at Nova Scotia Health sites. You do not need a referral.

### **For more information, visit:**

› <http://www.nshealth.ca/service-details/Occupational%20Therapy>

You can also get occupational therapy by calling your local occupational therapy clinic. You can find a clinic online or by calling 211. You do not need a referral. You must pay for this service. If you have private health insurance, check if it covers occupational therapy.

**In Nova Scotia you can call 811 to talk with  
a registered nurse about your health care  
questions 24/7.**

