

# Long COVID-19 Patient Advice Sheet

## What is Coronavirus (COVID-19)?

COVID-19 is a highly contagious virus that mainly attacks the lungs. It is transmitted through droplets created from sneezing and coughing from those infected. The virus enters the body via the nose, mouth and eyes.

The most commonly reported symptoms of COVID-19 are:

- a new continuous cough
- a fever
- loss of appetite/taste/smell
- fatigue
- muscle aches
- shortness of breath when moving around
- sputum production

Some people may require hospitalisation to treat these symptoms.

The severity and duration of symptoms for people who have COVID-19 can vary. For most people, symptoms last 7-14 days and will be very mild. To manage mild symptoms:

- stay hydrated
- take paracetamol if you have a temperature
- rest
- get up and move about at regular intervals If you need additional advice, visit the NHS 111 online service [www.111.nhs.uk/covid-19](http://www.111.nhs.uk/covid-19)

## What do I do if my symptoms get worse?

Monitor your symptoms regularly. If you get one of the following:

- Worsening shortness of breath
- A new or returning fever
- Worsening ability to concentrate
- Chest pain

Please call 111 for more advice or for a medical emergency or dial 999 immediately.

## How might I feel after having COVID-19?

The length of time that it takes to recover from COVID-19 varies from person to person, for some it will be days, others weeks or months. The more severe your symptoms, the longer it might take for you to return to what is normal for you. Symptoms include:

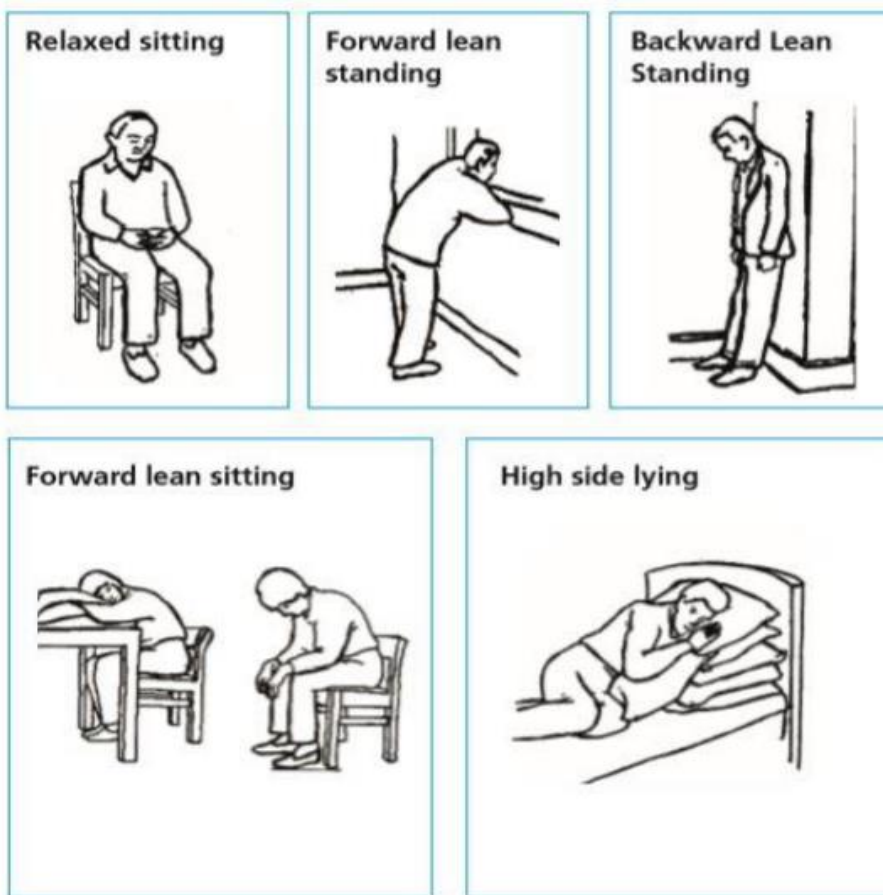
- Severe fatigue
- Ongoing breathlessness
- Muscle weakness
- Post viral cough
- Difficulties with memory/confusion

This might make it more difficult to do the things you are normally able to do, such as housework, having a wash, getting dressed or walking up and down the stairs.

## Ways to help you manage your symptoms

### Breathlessness

These positions can help ease your breathlessness and can be used when resting or when mobilising:



## Breathing Exercises

The following exercises can help you manage your breathlessness and reduce its impact on your everyday activities:

- Take a slow breath in through your nose
  - Try to relax your shoulders and neck
  - Allow the air to fill up from the bottom of your lungs to the top of your chest
  - Breathe gently out through pursed lips (as if you were going to blow out a candle) to create space for the next breath in
- Keeping cool by opening a window and using a wet flannel to cool the area around your nose and mouth this can reduced the sensation of breathlessness.

## Managing your Cough

- Stay hydrated - take small sips, one after the other, avoid taking large sips
- Drink warm honey and lemon or another warm drink, this can help to soothe the throat
- Steam inhalation – pour hot water into a bowl and put your head over the bowl. If comfortable, cover your head and bowl with a towel

Exercises to help clear your chest using an Active Cycle of Breathing Technique (ACBT) exercise consisting of three breathing exercises can help clear the mucus off your chest:

### 1. Breathing control

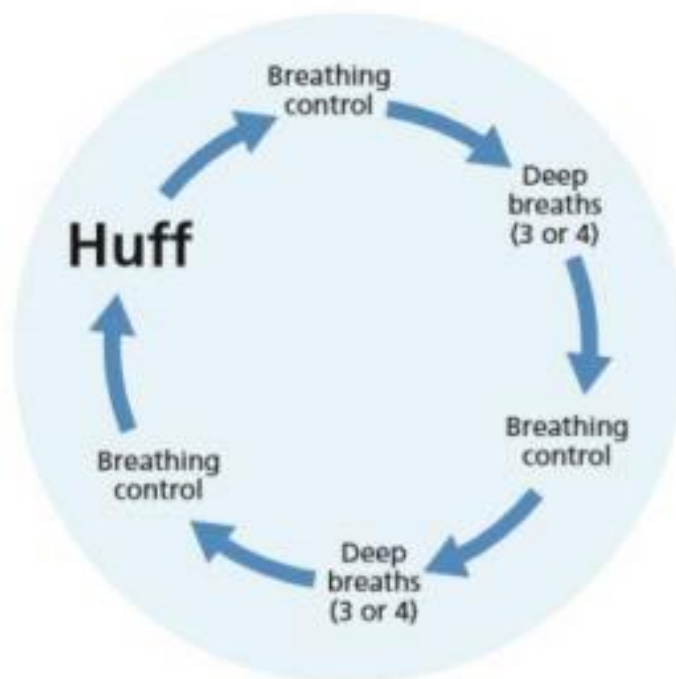
- Gentle, relaxed breathing with your shoulders relaxed

### 2. Deep breaths

- Breath in slowly and deeply
- Gently breath out without forcing it
- Repeat 3-4 times only (too many can make you feel dizzy)

### 3. Forced expiration techniques (Huff)

- Take a medium sized breath in
  - Breath out forcefully for a short time
  - Keep your mouth open and use your stomach and chest muscles
  - Think 'huffing' a mirror to polish it
  - Repeat 1-2 times
  - Always finish on a cough or huff
  - Stop when your huff is dry on two consecutive cycles



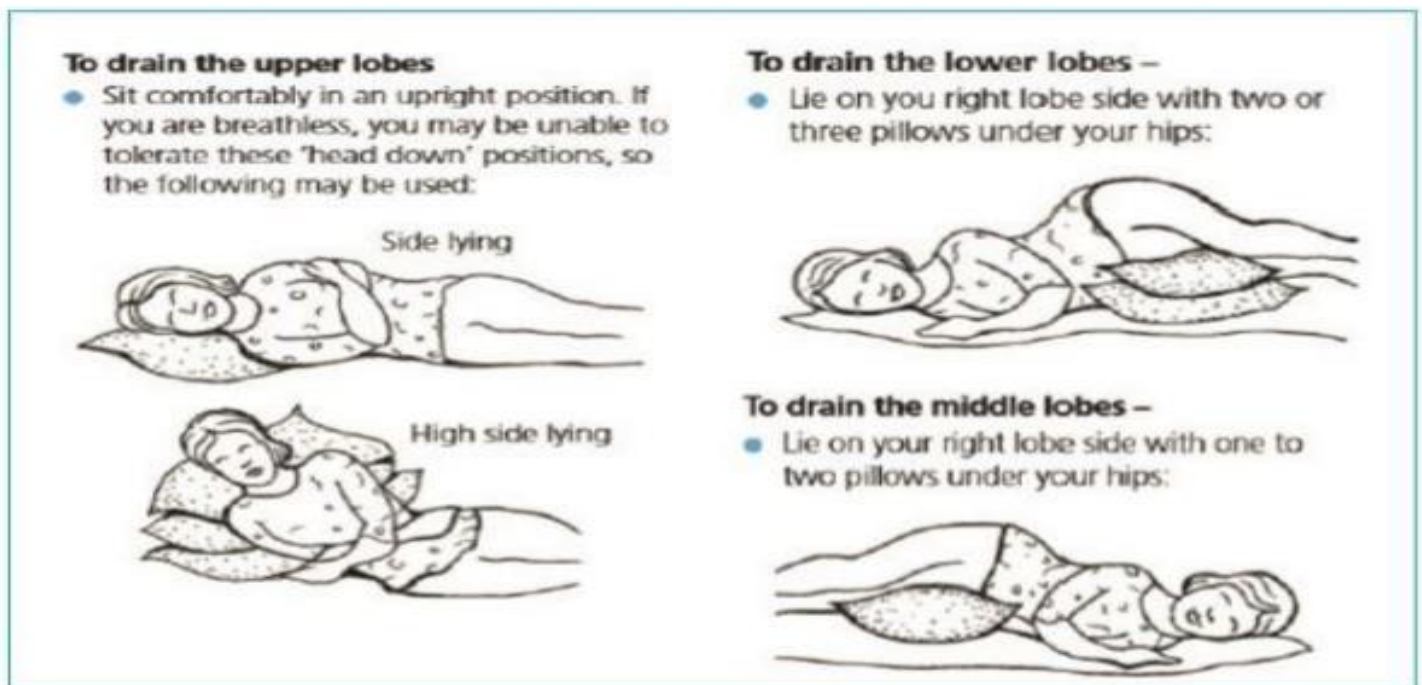
How often and how long?

- Continue to do until you feel your chest is clearer
- Clear as much mucus as you can without becoming exhausted

- Perform for at least 10 minutes, but no longer than 30 minutes
- If productive 2-3 times per day Use the following positions, along with ACBT to help clear your chest.

However:

- don't use immediately before or after a meal
- stop if you have any side effects
- chose the position below that you feel would best drain your lungs, you can do this in discussion with a health care professional
- speak to a heath care professional before doing this if have
  - Nausea
  - Acid Reflux
  - Become significantly breathless
  - Have blood in your phlegm
  - Have a recent chest, spine or rib injury
  - Feel wheezy



## Fatigue Management

You are likely to find that your energy levels fluctuate from day to day. Use the '3 Ps' to help manage this:

### 1. Prioritise

- Think about what you want to achieve in your day
- Does it need to be done today?
- What can you ask a family member to help you with?

### 2. Plan

- Gather all the items you will require for the task
- Think about how you can break the task down in small sections

- Think about the time you are at your best to complete the activity
- Plan the activity on a day you have support around you

### 3. Pace

- Allow enough time
- Rest regularly
- Sit and rest where you can
- Use equipment to help

## Emotional Support

The experience of having COVID-19 can be very frightening. It is very understandable that the experience may have an emotional impact. Whether you have had mild or more severe symptoms, these are some common difficulties that you may be having:

- Feeling anxious when breathless
- Worries about health or about family or friends getting ill
- Feeling low in mood
- Poor sleep
- Money / housing / employment worries

What can help?

- Avoid watching too much news or social media if it is making you feel anxious, try limiting yourself to looking at the news once a day
- Speak to family and friends
- Try to do activities that you find enjoyable and relaxing
- Don't be too hard on yourself if there are some things that you are finding harder to do, remind yourself that recovery takes time
- Focus on what is in your control like eating well

Where can I get more help and advice?

If you continue to feel overwhelmed by your symptoms speak to your GP. Alternatively, you can call the Black Country Mental Health Support line on 0800 008 6516. The line is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

If you need further support, contact your GP

We have specialist clinics across the Black Country and West Birmingham to help you if you are struggling to cope with your symptoms. Please contact your GP.

**Other useful websites:**

[www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk](http://www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk)

<https://patient.info/news-and-features/long-covid-what-support-is-available>

<https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/long-covid/what-is-long-covid>