



Irish Society of
Chartered
Physiotherapists
The Voice of Physiotherapy in Ireland

A GUIDE TO Post COVID-19 Rehabilitation



It can be normal to feel tired, weak or short of breath after you are discharged from hospital. However, being active can help you recover quicker. This booklet is designed to give you simple advice to help you recover after your admission to hospital with Covid-19.

How much can I do?

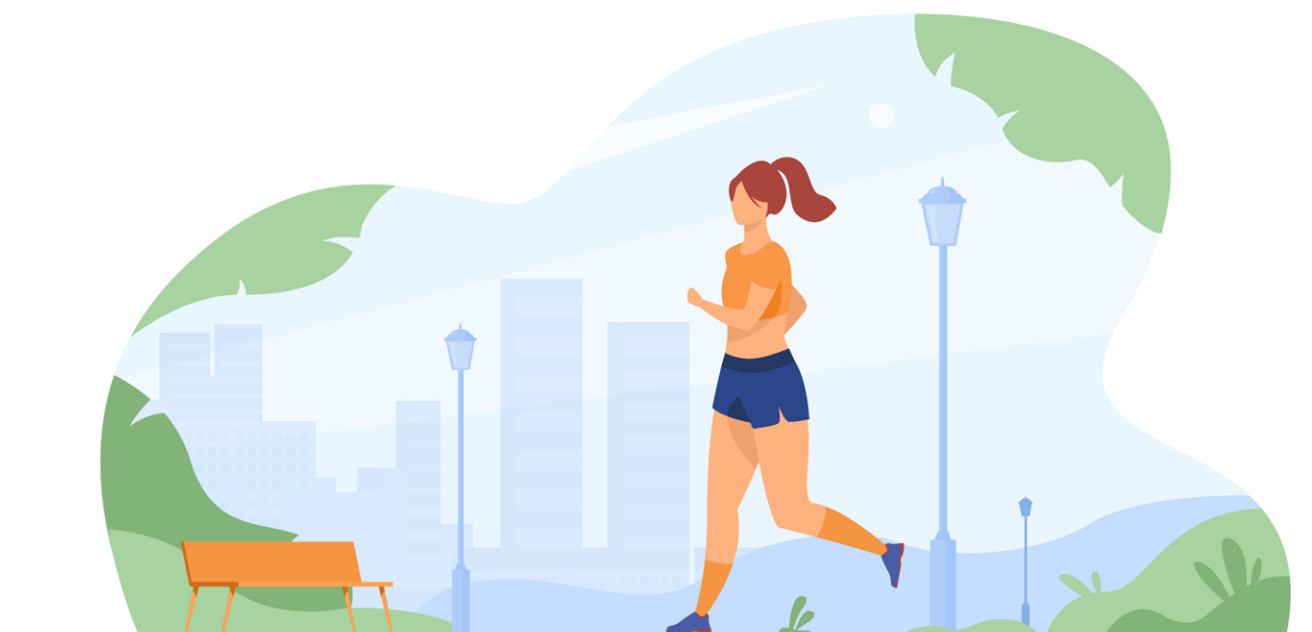
On discharge from hospital you can exercise outside your home in accordance with government restrictions. Your aim over the next few weeks should be to increase your activities gradually. However, in order to achieve this, you will need to pace yourself. Regular exercise is good for you but keep in mind that it will take you time to get back to your normal activities.

- Start slowly and introduce new activities gradually
- Set yourself realistic targets each week
- Rest when you feel tired
- Do not compare yourself to others

It is important to monitor your breathlessness when you exercise. You should exercise at a level whereby you are slightly out of breath but still able to talk.

Pacing

Don't worry if you feel more tired and that you have less energy than usual. This is normal and may last for up to 6-8 weeks. The key is to 'listen to your body' and slow down. Take more rests and change how you do daily tasks. Try and plan your day; ensuring balance with your daily activities and some exercise.



Energy Management

Use energy saving techniques like sitting on a stool to do the ironing/gardening or when preparing food. When you take some time out to rest, try to get into the prone position, this means lying on your front. You can use cushions and pillows to make yourself more comfortable.

Stress Management

Feeling anxious about having had Covid-19 is understandable. One way to manage your stress/anxiety is to stay in contact with people. Try to talk to a friend or family member daily online or on the phone or take time to read a book, do a crossword or watch a TV programme you enjoy. Contact your GP if you feel your anxiety and stress isn't manageable.

Walking

Walking is one of the simplest but best ways to begin to regain your strength and fitness.



How much walking to do?

The following is a guide only. After 6 weeks you should aim to be walking at least 30 minutes 5 days of the week. This walking should be reasonably fast so that you are slightly out of breath (you should still be able to 'talk and walk'). Try to plan your walks e.g. is there somewhere you can take a break if you feel tired or breathless, like a wall or a bench to sit on.

Week 1: 5-10-minute walks daily

Week 2: 10-15-minute walks daily

Week 3: 5-10-minute walks daily

Week 4: 20-25-minute walks daily

Weeks 5-6: 25-30-minute walks daily

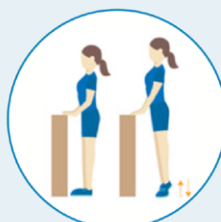
Exercises that can be completed at home



Knee Extensions

- Sit tall in a chair with your back well supported.
- Straighten your leg fully and bring your toes up towards you.
- Hold for 5 seconds.
- Lower your leg slowly.

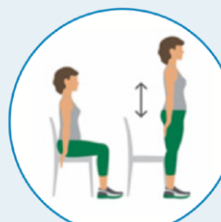
Repeat 10 times each leg until your leg tires.



Heel Raises

- Stand tall in front of your kitchen counter or similar sturdy surface.
- Hold on with both hands and look straight ahead.
- Place your feet hip distance apart.
- Lift your heels slowly and squeeze your bum muscles.
- Lower heels slowly to the ground.

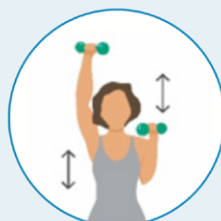
Repeat 10 times until your legs tire.



Sit to Stand

- Sitting on a sturdy chair.
- Stand up slowly.
- Once upright, slowly sit back down.

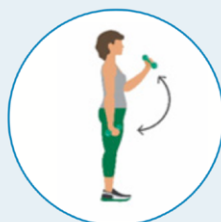
See how many you can do in 30 seconds.



Overhead Press

- Sitting tall on a sturdy chair.
- Hold a tin of beans/bottle of water in each hand.
- Lift one arm over your head at a time.

Repeat 10 times each side/until your arms tire.



Bicep Curls

- Sitting on a study chair or standing tall near a stable surface.
- Hold a tin of beans/bottle of water in each hand.
- Bend your elbow towards your shoulder one at a time.

Repeat 10 times each side/until your arms tire.

If you feel as though your symptoms are worsening or that you need further treatment, please contact your GP.

Physiotherapy advice for breathlessness in patients with COVID-19

How to manage your breathlessness?

Breathlessness is a common symptom of COVID-19. Some people describe it as feeling 'puffed', 'short of breath' or 'winded'.

In the early stages of COVID-19 you may experience breathlessness when doing what you would consider to be minimal activity e.g. getting dressed, walking or showering. During this time it is important to slow down and pace yourself. The feeling of shortness of breath may continue for a period of time after your illness. You may have lost strength and fitness as you won't have been as active. This should improve as you recover from your illness and get fitter.

Feeling breathless can make you feel panicked or anxious. This can make your breathlessness worse. The exercises in this leaflet are designed to help you control and monitor your breathing.

What positions can I use to help my breathing?

The following positions support the muscles of the body that help with breathing and can help to ease shortness of breath. Choose a position from the ones below which suits what you are doing. It is important to try and relax in these positions. A good way of doing this is by focusing on relaxing the muscles in your neck and shoulders.





Sitting leaning forward

Sit leaning forward resting your elbows on your knees or the arms of the chair.



Sitting leaning forward at a table

Sit leaning forward with your elbows resting on a table. You may wish to put some pillows or cushions on the table for comfort.



Standing leaning forward

Lean forwards resting your elbows onto a chair, a wall or a railing. You could use a walking stick or a frame if you use one for walking.

Breathing Control

Relaxed Tummy Breathing

This breathing technique can help if you are breathless after doing activity. It may also help you feel more relaxed if you are feeling anxious or panicky.

Breathing from the tummy often does not come naturally. You should therefore practice relaxed tummy breathing when you are not breathless. This will help you master the technique. Before practising, make sure you are in a comfortable position, with your head and back supported and shoulders and upper chest relaxed. Place one hand on your tummy. Feel the tummy rise and expand as you breathe in and relax down as you breathe out. Breathe gently when practising; there should only be a slight movement of your tummy at rest.

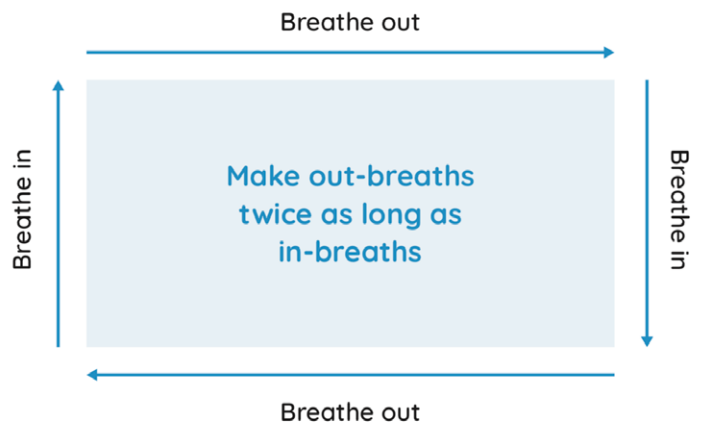
‘Breathe low and slow, relax, let go’

If you have a tendency to breathe with small, fast breaths from the top of our chest, you may find taking slower, deeper breaths from your tummy helps to ease breathlessness.

Breathing Control

'Breathe a rectangle'

When practising relaxed tummy breathing some people like to picture a rectangle, like shown below. Wherever you are, there is often a rectangle to be seen, whether this is a book, a TV, computer or tablet screen, door, window, table top, or even a picture on the wall.

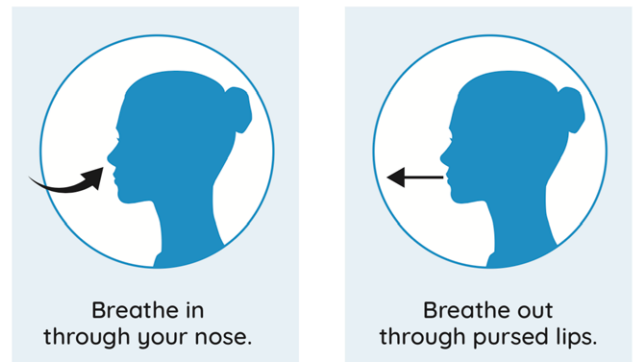


Breathing Control

Pursed Lip Breathing

You may find this helpful if you are very breathless, become anxious or if you find tummy breathing difficult.

This type of breathing allows more time for the air to leave your lungs, making it easier to take the next breath in.



Find a comfortable position. You could choose one of the positions of ease as shown previously. Relax your shoulders. Breathe in through your nose then breathe out in a relaxed fashion through pursed lips. Continue until you feel your breathing is under control.

General Advice

- Avoid breath holding during activities e.g. stair climbing, housekeeping etc.
- Avoid rushing. Try to pace activities. This might mean allowing more time to do activities e.g. getting out of bed, showering, dressing etc.
- Try to 'blow as you go'. This means breathing out on effort e.g. blow out when lifting or when standing up from a chair.

If you feel as though your symptoms are worsening or that you need further treatment, please contact your GP.

Find a Physio Near You

Use our “Find a Physio” tool to find a Chartered Physiotherapist in your area

askthephysio.ie



The Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists acknowledges and thanks its Interest Group in Respiratory Care (CPRC) for developing this leaflet and also thanks its Interest Group in Neurology and Gerontology (CPNG) for endorsing the leaflet.

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