



Long COVID Patient Information Booklet

Helping you to recover and manage your symptoms following COVID -19



Your health, your way



Long COVID Patient Information Booklet

What is Long COVID?

The length of time that it takes to recover from COVID-19 varies from person to person. For most people it will be days or couple of weeks. However, for some people, symptoms can last several weeks or months after the infection has gone, this is commonly called "Long COVID". The chances of having long-term symptoms does not seem to be linked to how ill you are when you first get COVID-19. People who had mild symptoms at first can still have long-term problems.

Symptoms include:

- Severe fatigue
- Chest pain or tightness
- Ongoing breathlessness
- Muscle/joint pain
- Post viral cough
- Changes to taste and smell
- Nausea/abdominal symptoms
- Difficulties with memory/confusion
- Depression/anxiety

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.

What causes Long COVID

Long COVID is still new, and we don't know why it happens. It could be that the initial infection sends some people's immune systems into overdrive, meaning they attack not just the virus but their own organs. The virus entering and damaging our cells might explain some symptoms like a loss of smell and taste, while damage to blood vessels could, for example, contribute to heart problems.

How do you treat Long COVID

Currently there are no proven drug treatments to reduce the duration of the illness.

Focus of treatment is to manage symptoms and gradually increase activity where possible.

This booklet will help you manage your symptoms from home to help with your Long COVID recovery.

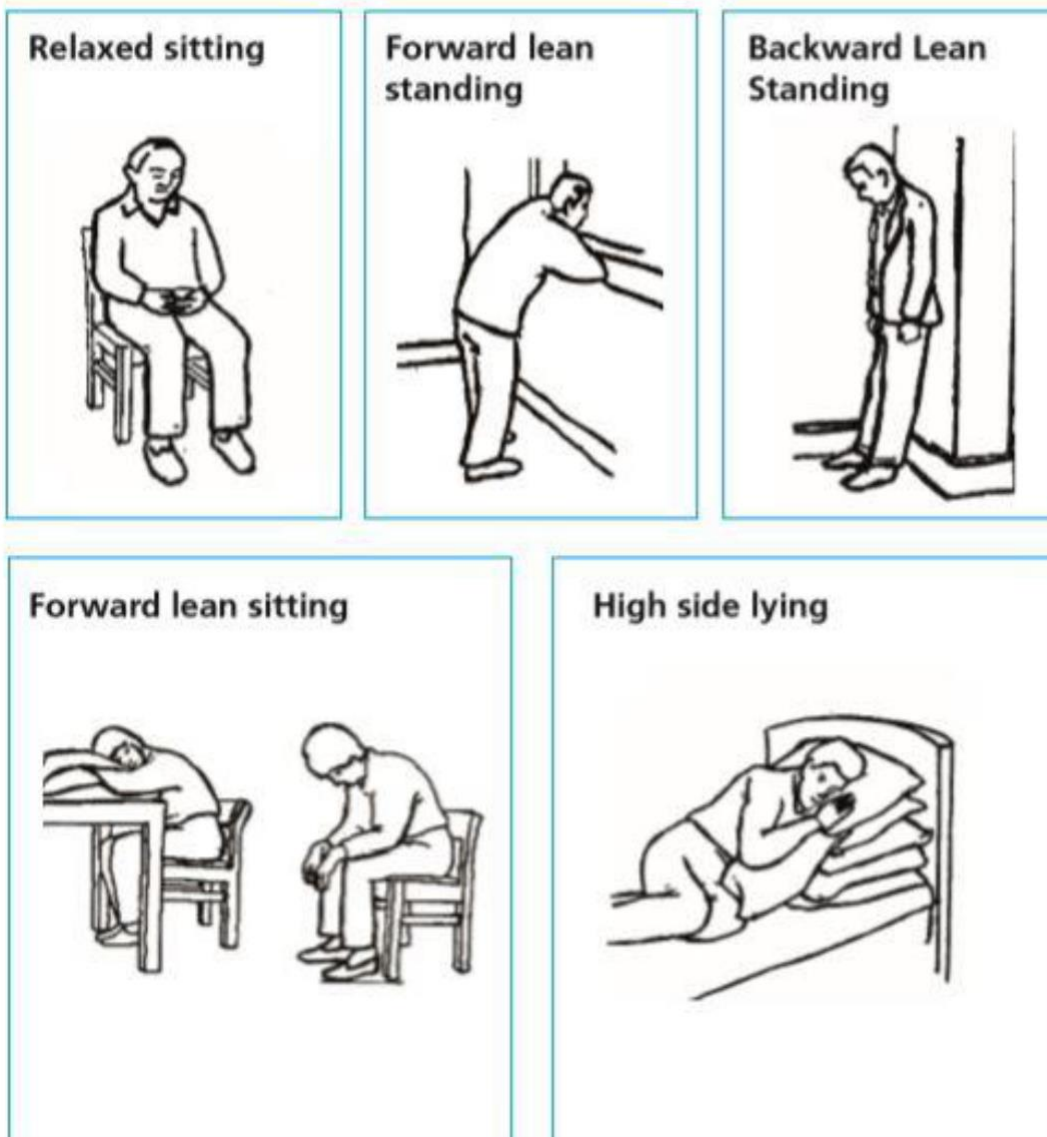
Long COVID Patient Information Booklet

Ways to help you manage your symptoms

There are several rehabilitation exercises and techniques you can do at home to help with your Long COVID symptoms and help you recover faster.

Breathlessness

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



Long COVID Patient Information Booklet

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.

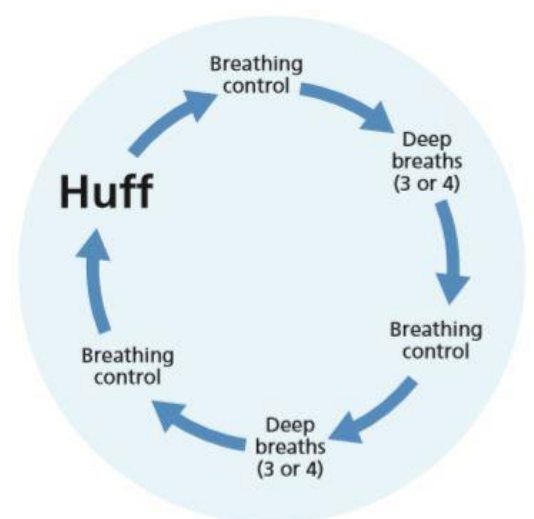
Managing your Cough

- 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



Long COVID Patient Information Booklet

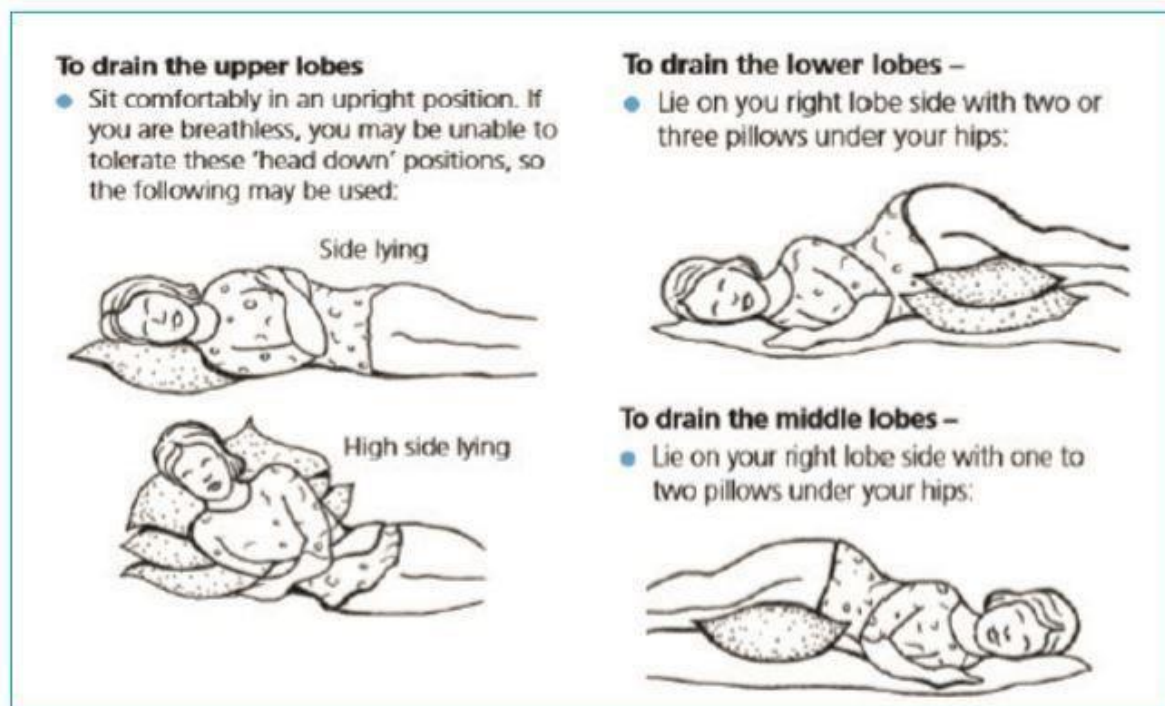
How often and how long?

- 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



Long COVID Patient Information Booklet

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 Long COVID can be very frightening. It is very understandable that the experience may have an emotional impact. Anxiety and Depression can also be a biological symptom to a Long COVID.

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

If you continue to feel overwhelmed by your symptoms speak to your GP.



Long COVID Patient Information Booklet

Additional Resource

Below are a range of local services and useful links that can offer advice and support should you need it:

More Information

Visit health navigator: <https://www.healthnavigator.org.nz/health-a-z/c/covid-19-long-covid/>

Ministry of health: <https://www.health.govt.nz/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-health-advice-public/about-covid-19/long-covid>

Mental Health: <https://www.healthnavigator.org.nz/health-a-z/c/covid-19-positive-mental-wellbeing/>

Financial Support: <https://covid19.govt.nz/isolation-and-care/financial-support/>