

Recovering from COVID: Breathing exercises and physical activity



If you've had COVID there are simple exercises you can do to help you recover faster, improve your breathing, and get back into physical activity sooner. Try out some of the techniques and exercises below.

If your symptoms are life threatening call Triple Zero (000).

Breathing positions

If you're experiencing breathlessness, you can try the following positions to help ease breathing.

1 Lie flat on your stomach



4 Sit on a chair and lean forward with your arms on your lap



2 Lie propped up on your side with pillows



5 Stand and lean forward onto a stable surface (such as a window sill)



3 Sit at a table and lean forward with a pillow



6 Lean with your back against a wall and feet slightly apart



Image credit: World Health Organization

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Breathing technique

These techniques can help to relax and control your breathing.

Controlled breathing

Get comfortable and put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach. Slowly breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. Concentrate on your breathing and try to use as little effort as possible.



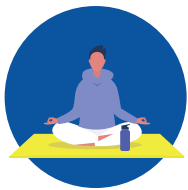
Paced breathing

If you're carrying out activities like climbing stairs or walking up a hill, pace yourself. Breathe in before you make the effort such as climbing a step, then breathe out as you climb the step.



Physical activities

As you recover from COVID, you should start to reintroduce exercise and physical activity into your daily routine. Return to exercise over 5 phases and stay at each phase for a minimum of 7 days. You should only move up a stage if the exercise is easy or your exertion levels are low. If at any time you're finding it too difficult, drop back a phase. If you're experiencing chest pain, dizziness or ongoing breathlessness, stop and seek medical attention.



Phase 1

Prepare to exercise

Such as controlled breathing, gentle walking, stretching, and balance exercises.



Phase 2

Low intensity exercise

Such as walking, light household tasks and gardening.



Phase 3

Moderate exercise

Such as brisk walking, light jogging, and resistance exercises.



Phase 4

Coordination exercise

Such as running, cycling, swimming, or dancing.



Phase 5

Return to regular exercise

Such as going to the gym or participating in sports.

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Exercises

Always exercise safely. You may need to exercise with someone else, especially if you have been in hospital for COVID-19 or if you have other health conditions that may impact your breathing or mobility. Try working through all these suggestions, but if you cannot manage all the exercises or stretches, do the ones that you can.

Always warm up before exercise to reduce the risk of injury. Warm up for about 5 minutes. You should feel slightly breathless after warming up. Repeat each warm-up 2-4 times.

1 Shoulder shrugs

Slowly lift your shoulders up towards your ears and down again.



4 Knee lifts

Slowly lift your knee up and down, no higher than your hip. Repeat with the other side.



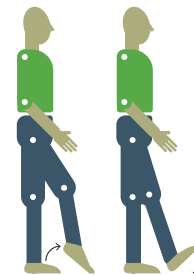
2 Shoulder circles

slowly move your shoulders around in a circle, forwards and backwards.



5 Ankle taps

Tap your toes and then your heel on the ground in front of you. repeat with the other side.



3 Side bends

Slowly bend sideways, sliding your arm towards the floor. Repeat with the other side.



6 Ankle circles

Sitting down, draw circles with your toes in front of you. Repeat with the other foot.



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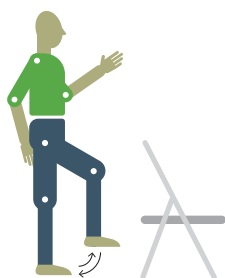


Light and moderate exercises

Any activity that makes you feel moderately to almost severely breathless can be counted towards your exercise. Below are some examples of exercises you can do. Gradually increase the intensity of your exercise as you continue to recover from COVID. It may take a while to return to the level of activity you were normally able to do before you became unwell.

1 Marching on the spot

Holding onto a chair or surface for support, lift your knees one at a time. Keep up a slow and steady pace. As your fitness improves, lift your legs so your knees are at hip height, and increase speed.



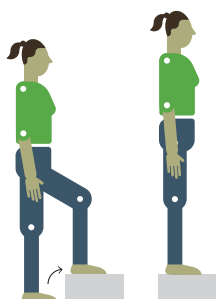
3 Walking

Walk at a steady pace on a flat surface. Use a walking frame, walking stick or crutches if needed. As your fitness improves increase the speed or distance you walk. Start to increase your incline if you are on a treadmill or try walking up small hills if you are outside.



2 Step-ups

Holding onto a handrail, chair or surface for support, step up and down. After 10 steps, change the leg you start on. You can use stairs or a platform. As your fitness improves, increase the height of your steps or your speed.



4 Jogging or cycling

Only jog or cycle if you are well enough to do so. Do not start jogging or cycling if you did not do so before you were unwell. Begin jogging or cycling at a slow and steady pace. As your fitness improves, start increasing your speed and/or distance.



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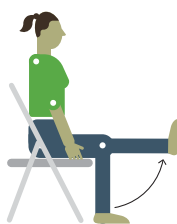


Strengthening exercises

If you have been unwell with COVID, you might be feeling weak. Below are some exercises that can help to strengthen your muscles. Try to complete up to 3 sets of 10 repetitions for each exercise, taking a short break in between. Keep your back straight and your tummy tucked in to prevent injury.

1 Knee straightening

Sitting in a chair with your feet together, gently lift your leg until your knee is straight. Hold it for a moment and then slowly lower it. Repeat with your other leg. As your strength improves, increase the time you hold your leg out for.



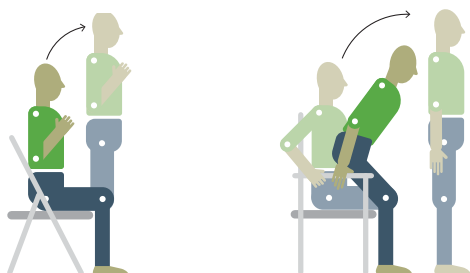
3 Heel raises

Using the back of a chair for balance, slowly rise to your toes before lowering them back down again. As your fitness improves, try standing on your toes for three seconds. Try one leg at a time.



2 Sit to stand

Sit with your feet hip-width apart and your arms by your side or crossed over your chest. Slowly stand up, holding the position for about 3 seconds. Slowly sit back down onto the chair. Keep your feet on the floor for the entire exercise. You may need to use your arms to push up from the chair until you have gained a bit more strength.



4 Squats

Stand with your back against a wall and your feet slightly apart. Move your feet away from the wall slightly. Slowly bend your knees so your back slides down the wall slightly. Pause for a moment before slowly straightening your knees again. Always keep your hips higher than your knees. As your strength improves, increase the distance you bend your knees.



[Strengthening exercises continued next page](#)

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Strengthening exercises continued

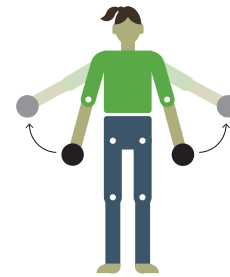
5 Wall push off

Place your hands at shoulder height against a wall, with your feet away from the wall slightly. Keeping your body straight at all times, slowly bend your elbows. Gently push away from the wall again, until your arms are straight. As your strength improves, stand further away from the wall.



7 Arm raises to the side

Hold a weight in each hand, with your arms by your sides, and your palms facing inwards. Raise both arms out to the side. Slowly lower them back down. As your strength improves, increase the height that you lift your arms. Do not lift them above shoulder height. Try increasing the weight you use.



6 Bicep curl

With your arms by your side, hold a weight in each hand with your palms facing forwards. Keeping the top part of your arms still, gently bring the weights up, bending at the elbows. Slowly lower them again. As your strength improves, increase the weight you use.



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Cooling down

Cooling down allows your body to return to normal after exercise. Cool down for about 5 minutes, or until your breathing returns to normal. Below are some examples of cool downs you can try.

1 Gentle walking

Walk at a slow pace or gently march on the spot for about 2 minutes.



3 Side stretch

Reach your right arm up to the ceiling and then rest it lightly behind your head. Slowly lean over the left. You should feel a light stretch along the right side of your body. Slowly return to your starting position. Repeat on the other side.



2 Repeat warm-up exercises

Try repeating some of your warm-up exercises to move your joints.



4 Shoulder stretch

Hold your right arm straight in front of you (shoulder height). Using your left arm, gently draw the right arm to your chest. You should feel a stretch around your shoulder. Slowly return to your starting position. Repeat on the other side.



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Cooling down continued

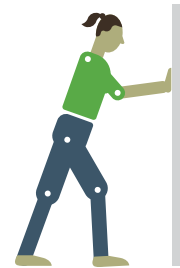
5 Hamstring stretch

Sit on the very edge of a chair with your back straight and feet flat on the floor. Place your right leg out straight in front of you so your heel is resting on the ground. Rest your hands on your left leg for balance. Bend forwards at your hips until you feel a slight stretch down the back of your right leg. Return to your starting position. Repeat on the other side.



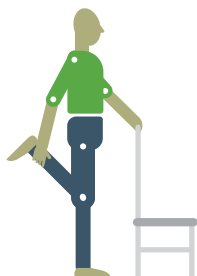
7 Quad stretch

Using the back of a chair for support, stand up straight with your knees close together. Bend your right leg up towards your bottom until you feel a stretch along the front of your thigh. Try to hold your right ankle with your right hand. Return to the starting position and repeat on the opposite side.



6 Calf stretch

Stand with your feet apart, leaning forwards onto a wall for support. Keep your body upright and step your right leg behind you. Bend your front knee, keeping your back leg straight and your heel on the floor. You should feel a light stretch in the back of your lower leg. Return to your starting position. Repeat on the other side.



For more tips on recovering from COVID please refer to **Recovering from COVID** and **Post-COVID and long COVID** factsheets.

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