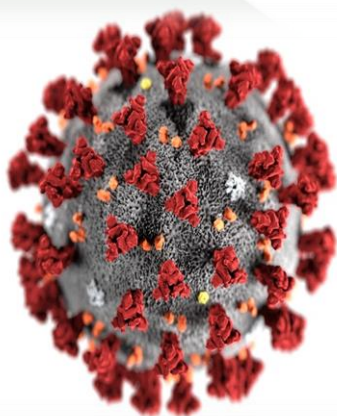


# Post Viral Fatigue – COVID19

Persistent Physical Symptoms Service



**Post-viral fatigue** is the term used for an extended period of feeling unwell and fatigued after a viral illness.

Fatigue is a common symptom of COVID-19 infection so it is likely that some people will continue to experience fatigue for some time after the virus has cleared.

## What can I do to manage fatigue after COVID-19?

### Whilst you are unwell

If you have symptoms of COVID-19 it is likely that you will have some level of fatigue as part of this. This is a normal part of the body's response to fighting a viral infection.

**SELF-ISOLATE** – Follow government guidelines. If your health deteriorates seek medical help following the current guidelines. Dial 111 for general advice or 999 for urgent medical attention.

**REST** - This is **most important** as it allows your body to focus on fighting off infection. In this context rest means resting the body and the mind, so doing very little. Use relaxation, breathing and mindfulness apps to help support quality rest. If something doesn't work for you try another strategy until you find one that does. You can also use sensory input to help rest and relax you – like your favourite relaxing music, blanket, fragrance or a hot water bottle. Try to limit screen time as this requires concentration.

**NUTRITION** – Try to maintain a healthy diet and regular fluid intake. If your appetite is low, try eating little and often rather than big meals. If you are not managing to eat as much try to increase your fluid intake. We should be aiming to drink at least two litres of water a day.

**MOVE** – It is important to keep moving. Little and often throughout the day. Try some deep breathing and gentle stretches to stop you getting stiff and to help circulation

**ACTIVITY** – you may find you can do less than usual. This is normal, don't try to push through it, and remember that physical and cognitive (thinking) and emotional activities all use energy and they will make you feel more tired.

**VALUED ACTIVITY** – do some low energy activities that you enjoy, if you can. Try reading or watching things for short periods (remember not too much screen time). Rest regularly between any activities (see above for REST).

**STOP WORK** – until you feel fully well you should stop work to allow your body to focus on fighting the infection and recovering. Work can include paid employment, household duties or caring roles.

**ALLOW TIME** – COVID-19 will affect people to different degrees so give yourself the time you need to recover from it. The impact afterwards doesn't always reflect the severity of the virus – you do not have to be hospitalised to experience post-viral fatigue. There will often be pressure to get back to your usual activities as soon as possible, do not rush. Practice self-compassion- what would you tell a friend in the same situation?

### As your symptoms subside

**TRY ACTIVITY** – If you feel fatigue and other symptoms are ongoing after the isolation period you can try to start a small amount of light activity. Remember that your stamina will have reduced while you were ill and you will fatigue more easily. **Be compassionate** to yourself and start with less activity than usual and then REST to see how you feel before trying to do it again. Find the level which is manageable for you – you may get more fatigue the day after doing an activity so wait to see the result. Be realistic and kind to yourself.

**REST** – As you are improving your body needs rest to continue healing. Continue to have short rests throughout the day. If you're not sure if you need a REST, take one. During these rests, stop and do nothing and calm your mind if you can using breathing, mindfulness or relaxation strategies as mentioned above.

**DAILY ROUTINE** – Try and resume a daily routine for sleeping, eating and daily activities – if your previous routine isn't possible set a realistic one for now and follow it. It helps the body to stabilise itself again. Make small changes over a period of time to return to your normal routine.

**Remember don't rush.**

**SLOWLY INCREASE ACTIVITY** –increasing your activity levels too quickly can cause a setback in your recovery. So try and increase activity slowly and steadily with plenty of rests. Trying to 'push through' the fatigue is normally unhelpful.

It is easy to forget that everyday cognitive (thinking) activities such as checking emails, planning shopping, making decisions, worrying about family members all take energy. Be aware of these activities as well as physical and try not to spend too long a period of time all at once on this kind of activity. Try to set times for these and take REST between them. If in doubt REST sooner.

**WORK** – You may have to take longer off work than initially anticipated and may have to have a gradual return to work. Speak to your manager and get occupational health advice. You may also need a Fit note from your GP.

**VALUED ACTIVITY** – Don't forget to allow time for activities that you enjoy doing. As you start to get back to daily life you may be tempted to prioritise all the things that seem necessary but we need to balance this with enjoyment so choose to spend some energy on fun activity too, increasing gradually as you would other activities.

## Moving forward

It is not uncommon for fatigue to persist for several months and often a year or more after an illness. At present we do not yet know the long term effects of Covid-19. Try to keep your routine, get plenty of rest and remember to include valued activity into your day. Gradually pace up your activities within your own limitations and **don't push through**. Remember that stress and worry use energy so give yourself time and be kind to yourself.

## What if I am not improving?

**SEEK ADVICE** – If after 3-4 months you aren't seeing any improvement in fatigue after having symptoms of Covid-19 then you should ask your GP for advice so that they can check there aren't any other causes for the symptoms.

**SPECIALIST INPUT** – If you continue to experience high levels of fatigue then specialist services may be available to provide further guidance. Ask your GP regarding local referral options

**We hope this information is helpful. If you have any doubts please seek medical advice about your symptoms.**

For further information on any of the strategies mentioned in this leaflet please refer to:

<https://ppss.cumbria.nhs.uk>