

## COVID-19 RECOVERY ADVICE

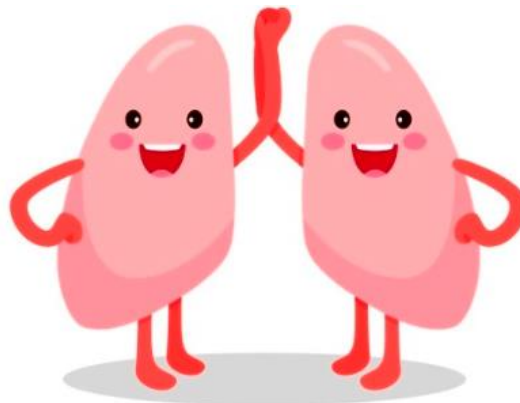
This education pack is to give you basic help after your recent illness.

This can help you with things such as breathlessness (being short of breath), your mood, your diet and more. These can all help you control the signs of your illness and how it makes you feel (your symptoms).

For online information visit: [www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk](http://www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk)

The following website is supported by Asthma UK and British Lung Foundation:

[www.post-covid.org.uk](http://www.post-covid.org.uk)



## What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a virus that mainly affects the lungs and can be spread from person to person. Breathlessness at rest and during activities is a normal symptom of COVID-19.

Rehabilitation (a treatment to help you feel better) will improve how much exercise you can do, muscle strength, help manage your breathlessness, and help with your recovery. Our treatments will focus on breathing and exercises.

Below are some examples of these treatments.

### Positions of Ease – these positions may help relax your breathing

Sit upright in an armchair with both arms supported on the chair arms or cushions. Let your shoulders drop and relax. Rest the soles of your feet on the floor.



Sit on a chair and let your body flop forwards. Rest both arms on a table or your knees to support you.



Lie on your side and support yourself with pillows under your upper body. Tuck the top pillow into your neck to support your head. Rest your top arm on a pillow placed in front of your chest and your top leg on another.



In your comfy position, relax your wrists, fingers and your jaw.

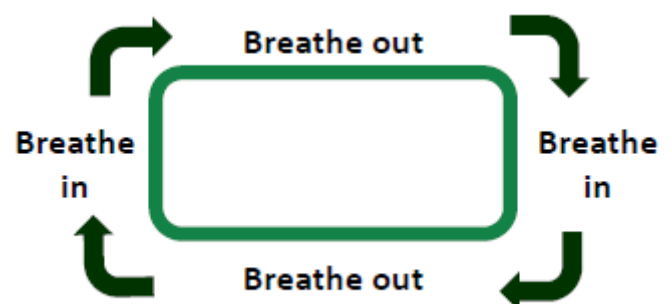
### Breathing Control – working on breathing in a slow pattern.

#### Tummy breathing

Rest a hand on your tummy and breathe in gently to feel your tummy rise. Then breathe out slowly through your nose or your mouth. Rest and wait for the next breath to come. You may find it helpful to purse your lips while you breathe out slowly as though you were making a candle flame flicker.

#### Breathe a rectangle

- Once you have found a relaxed seated position, look around for a rectangle. This might be a window, a door, picture, or even a book or television screen.
- Now follow the sides of the rectangle with your eyes as you breathe, breathing in on the short sides and out on the long sides.
- Gently slow the speed that your eyes move around the rectangle. You can pause at the corners to help slow your breathing.



## Exercise

Some people might not think it, but getting breathless when you are active is good for you! If you avoid tasks that make you out of breath, your muscles become weaker. Weaker muscles need more oxygen to work. Over time you will feel more and more breathless. This is called the vicious cycle of inactivity.

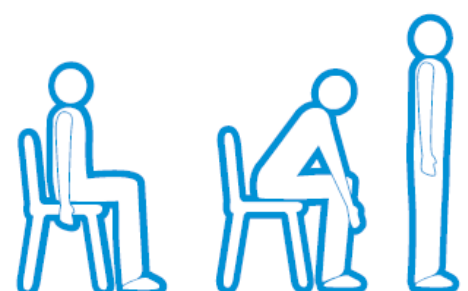
The good news is you can break this cycle and feel less short of breath! By being more active you can make your muscles stronger. You can also improve the flow of oxygen around your body.



Ideas for exercising at home or if having to self-isolate:

- Reduce amount of sitting time. Have regular breaks and change your position
- Walk across or around the biggest room or hallway
- Try some sit to stands, with or without arms for support
- Step ups – on and off bottom step – side step ups
- Full flight of stairs
- Walk a lap of the house downstairs and/or upstairs – include the garden if this is safe to access

Some exercises to get you started include:



### Knee extensions

- Sit on a chair, keeping thighs close
- Lift one foot out in front of you
- Lower your foot back slowly to the floor
- Repeat on the other leg

### Knee lifts

- Sit on a chair upright on the bony parts of your bottom
- Place your hands on your knees
- Lift your knees up one at a time.
- Do it quicker and higher to challenge your breathing

### Sit to stand

- Sit on a sturdy chair.
- Only use your hands if needed for safety
- Lean forward and stand up
- keep good posture when standing
- Sit back down slowly

The British Lung Foundation has a **free** exercise handbook and exercise videos at 3 levels available from their website: [www.blf.org.uk](http://www.blf.org.uk)

## Energy Conservation and Self- Management

### Pacing

Move at a relaxed pace, and breathe gently

Try not to hold your breath, or trying to move or turn too fast

Pace your breathing to your steps; breathe in over one step, breathe out over the next two steps

Stop and rest when you need to.

### Plan

Plan ahead your daily tasks, such as bathing or chores.

Spread your activity over the whole day

Break jobs into smaller tasks and rank them in order of importance

Take short breaks often or change your position to rest your body.

### Permission

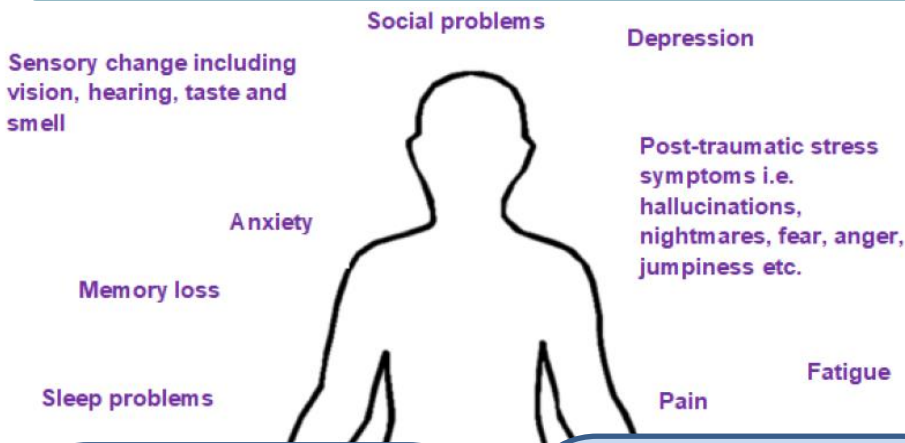
Be truthful to yourself with what you can manage

Try to do things in other ways to help with energy levels

Be patient with yourself and give yourself time to do things

Be happy with the things that you are able to do.

## Psychological Recovery



Being physically unwell can also have an affect your mood and how you feel. It can lead to issues such as memory loss or anxiety. With symptoms like breathlessness, it can make you feel scared or panicky, which can make your breathlessness worse. All of these things can affect how you think of things, but over time you can recover or adjust.

### Anxiety

Thinking about events or worrying about the future, can release adrenaline in the body which activates the bodies 'fight or flight' response

- Racing thoughts
- Increased breathing rate
- Increased heart rate
- Sinking feeling in the stomach
- Feeling hot with clammy hands

### Post-Traumatic Stress

After a stressful event it can take time for our brain to process what happened.

It is normal to have intense and scary visions that might not be real (hallucinations). You may also have nightmares. These should get better over days or weeks.

If you are struggling to manage or if you find that they continue for a long time, speak with your GP for help.

### What can I do?

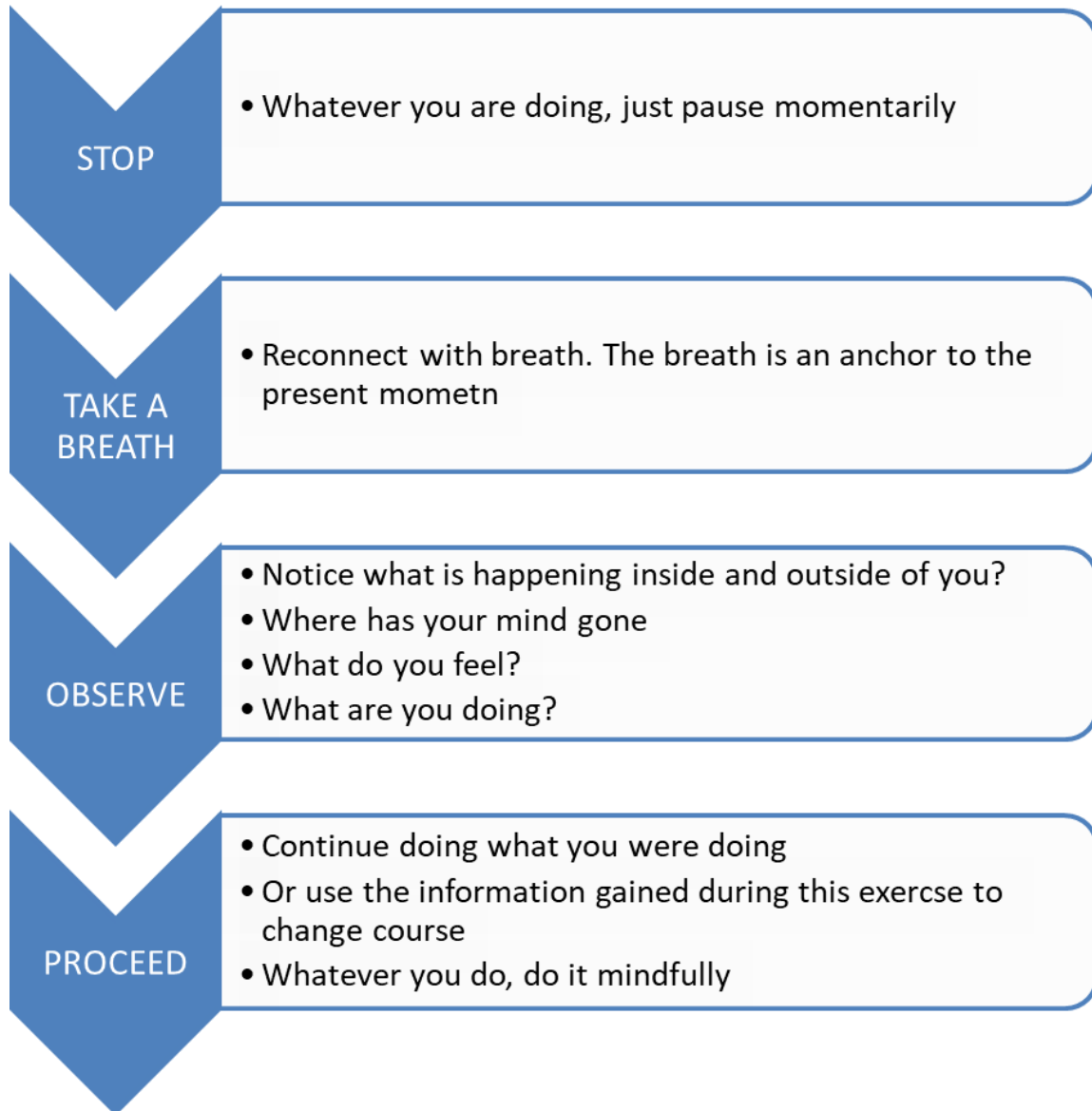
Talk about how you feel – this helps us to know how we feel more

Progress diary – keep a note on what you manage to do daily, no matter how small

Set small goals – remember you are still recovering, take it easy

Relaxation exercises – use STOP (below) and read the useful resources links

## STOP – something to help you relax



### **Mind**

Mental wellbeing during coronavirus

<http://www.mind.org.uk>

### **Headspace**

10 days free meditations

<http://www.headspace.com/>

### **Every Mind Matters**

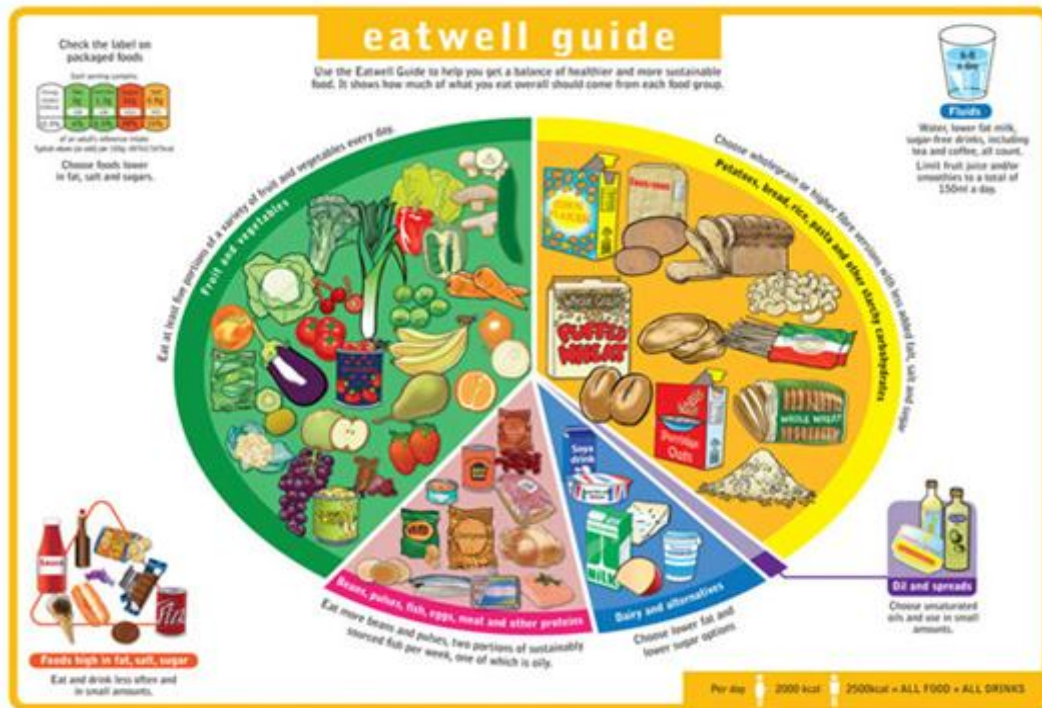
Advice and practical tips to look after your mental health and wellbeing

<http://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>



## Nutrition

COVID-19 can cause changes to taste and smell. Eating well and keeping a healthy weight is key to keeping your strength and fitness. Eating and drinking well can help your body have enough nutrients (energy, protein, vitamins and minerals) to help protect you from infection and to get better.



Eating well and keeping a healthy weight is important to keep your strength and fitness. Eating well helps the body have enough nutrients (energy, protein, vitamins and minerals) to help protect you from infection and recover from illness.

If you are struggling to eat enough, or if you are losing weight or strength in your muscles, you may need to think differently about the foods you are eating

- Eat smaller portions of energy and protein rich foods more often throughout the day
- Choose softer, moist foods that are easier to chew and swallow and take your time eating
- Add things such as cream, cheese, butter, olive oil, cream cheese, milk powder and ground almonds to foods like soups, stews, curries, scrambled eggs, potatoes to improve the quality your meals

If you are worried about the fact you are losing weight without trying to, ask for help from your GP. Or if you are finding it hard to eat enough, even if you are overweight, ask for help from your GP. You may need to be given extra supplies that are specially made to contain energy, protein, vitamins and minerals to help people who are finding it difficult to eat enough to get the nutrition they need. They can help you to get to, and stay at, a healthy weight.

## Swallowing and Voice Problems

Some people who have had COVID-19 may find it hard to eat and drink. You may feel more breathless and tired when eating and drinking. This is because, when you were ill, you were eating and drinking less. The muscles that you use for this will not have been used for a while.

Top tips for eating and drinking:

- Always sit up fully in a supportive position for any food or drink
- Eat or drink slowly
- Stop and rest if you are feeling breathless or tired
- Try and eat smaller amounts often over the whole day
- Take small sips or bites
- If you are getting short of breath when eating, try to choose soft easy to chew foods.

If you are using this advice but still having swallowing problems, or you have any of the following symptoms, please contact your GP:

- Coughing or choking when eating or drinking
- A wet or gurgly voice
- You have difficulty getting food down or food sticks in your throat
- New chest infections often
- Eating makes you feel tired or short of breath

Talking can be harder if you are breathless. Your voice might sound weak, quiet, rough or hoarse. You may have a sore throat if you have been coughing a lot.

A good breath is very important in helping us to speak in a clear voice that can be easily heard and understood by others. You may feel that your voice is weak and your speech is not as clear as it used to be. This should improve as your symptoms resolve.

Here are some tips of how to look after your voice and use clear speech:

- Sit in an upright position and take a breath before talking
- Speak in shorter sentences
- Reduce background noise when talking with others
- Drink plenty of water so your mouth does not become dry
- Avoid large amounts of spicy food and reduce your caffeine and alcohol intake
- Rest your voice if it starts to sound hoarse – don not try to force your speech.

## Local Support and Resources in Darlington and Teesside

### **Age UK**

Darlington; Tel: 0300 302 0100

[www.ageuknyd.org.uk](http://www.ageuknyd.org.uk)

### **Age UK**

Teesside; Tel: 01642 805500

[www.ageuk.org.uk/teesside](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/teesside)

A local charity working in the community to support older people, their families and carers

### **Talking Changes Darlington**

Tel: 0191 333 3300

[www.talkingchanges.org.uk](http://www.talkingchanges.org.uk)

Talking Therapy service to support with emotional issues

### **Impact on Teesside**

Tel: 01642 573924

[www.impactonteesside.com](http://www.impactonteesside.com)

### **British Lung Foundation**

Tel: 0300 030 555

[www.blf.org.uk](http://www.blf.org.uk)

UK charity providing advice and support for people living with lung conditions.

Please remember that everyone will feel differently following their illness and recovery times will vary. Be kind to yourself but if you are concerned please discuss with your GP.