

*Patient resource: Managing  
post-COVID-19 symptoms*



## **Patient resource: Managing post–COVID-19 symptoms**

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### **Recommended citation**

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. Patient resource: Managing post–COVID-19 symptoms. East Melbourne, Vic: RACGP, 2020.

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ABN: 34 000 223 807  
ISBN: 978-0-86906-593-8

Published December 2020

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*We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands and seas on which we work and live, and pay our respects to Elders, past, present and future.*

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## *Introduction*

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This guide gives you advice on managing mild post-COVID-19 symptoms at home, if you've been advised to do so by your general practitioner (GP), another doctor or your local public health unit.

At the end of this guide, you'll find a printable resource called 'My post-COVID-19 symptom diary'. To use this diary, work with your GP to list your symptoms and rank their severity on a scale of 0–10. Fill out your symptom diary every 2–3 days while you're recovering or as often as your GP recommends. This will help you to track your recovery and help your GP provide you with the best care at all times.

## What to expect post-COVID-19

Everyone will have a different experience in their recovery from COVID-19. Some people may recover in days, some in weeks; for others, it could be months. But although each case is unique, people recovering from more severe symptoms are likely to face a longer recovery period.

Schedule regular appointments with your GP to discuss your symptoms and how best to manage them. Your GP will tell you about any medicines that might suit your needs.

### Common symptoms you may experience during your recovery

Common symptoms	Less common symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fatigue</li><li>• Cough</li><li>• Breathlessness</li><li>• Joint or muscle pain</li><li>• Chest pain</li><li>• Change in sense of taste or smell</li><li>• Anxiety and/or low mood</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Insomnia</li><li>• Low-grade fever</li><li>• Headache</li><li>• Memory difficulties</li><li>• Confusion</li><li>• Muscle pain and weakness</li><li>• Stomach and digestion difficulties</li><li>• Rash</li><li>• Depression</li></ul>

**If you have any of the following symptoms, call emergency services on 000 immediately and tell the phone operator you've previously been diagnosed with COVID-19**

- Severe shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Severe chest pain or pressure
- A new or returning fever
- Worsening ability to concentrate and increased confusion
- Difficulty waking up

# Managing common post-COVID-19 symptoms at home

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The following information may help you manage some of the more common post-COVID-19 symptoms at home.

## Managing fatigue

Illness often changes your breathing patterns, requires you to use more energy, deconditions your muscles and increases stress. As a result, people recovering from COVID-19 often report feelings of fatigue.

When fatigued, typical daily activities can become exhausting. You may find you feel weak and tired after small amounts of physical activity or you can't process information or concentrate as efficiently as usual. You may feel frustrated and anxious.<sup>1</sup>

If you're experiencing fatigue, following the three Ps can help you to make the most of your body's available energy – **pace, plan, prioritise**.<sup>2</sup>

### The three Ps

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#### Pace

Don't push yourself to exhaustion. Instead, pace yourself. Save your energy by breaking up your daily activities into smaller, more manageable tasks. Rest often.

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#### Plan

Plan your week in advance. Spread activities that need more energy (eg gardening, food shopping, laundry) across the whole week, with plenty of rest planned in between. If you can, ask family members or friends to help you. Consider energy-saving options like food-delivery services.

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#### Prioritise

Only do essential tasks and activities. Either remove unnecessary tasks from your weekly plan or consider asking a family member or friend to do them for you.

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You should also:

- avoid lifting or moving items that may place strain on your body; if possible, push items instead of lifting them
- remember to breathe – don't hold your breath when completing tasks and activities
- try to get enough sleep every night, maintain a healthy diet and drink plenty of water.

**If completing standard daily tasks and activities becomes unmanageable, contact your GP.**

## Managing a cough and/or breathlessness

COVID-19 mainly affects your lungs, which means you may have a persistent cough and might have trouble catching your breath during your recovery from the virus.

Your GP may recommend certain breathing-control exercises and positions that will help clear your chest and improve breathlessness. They may also suggest medication, depending on what's best for you and your recovery.

If you're suffering from a persistent cough, ask your GP for advice. You can get temporary relief by:<sup>3</sup>

- staying well hydrated
- if you need to cough but don't have a drink nearby, try swallowing repeatedly instead, which mimics the act of sipping water
- lying down as flat as possible, which can help reduce your heart rate and drain built-up phlegm
- trying steam inhalation to help clear phlegm
  - pour hot water into a bowl, and then hover your head over the bowl
  - you can cover your head and the bowl with a towel to intensify the effects
- sipping warm fluids to help soothe a sore throat
- making sure the rooms you spend most of your time in have good air circulation – you can improve air circulation by opening a window or door.

You can manage breathlessness by:

- speaking to your GP about breathing-control exercises
- remaining calm – stress and anxiety can increase your heart rate, which only increases your breathing rate and breathlessness
- trying the following resting positions to steady your breathing:<sup>1</sup>

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Sit with a relaxed posture



Stand up and lean backwards so your back rests on a sturdy surface



Sit while resting your head forwards on a sturdy surface (eg a table) or resting your arms on your thighs to stop yourself from folding all the way forward



Lie down with pillows propping up your head so you're not lying flat



Stand up and lean forward slightly, resting your arms on a sturdy surface



## Maintaining your mental health and wellbeing

The emotional impact of COVID-19 can be significant. Many people experience low moods, feelings of hopelessness, anxiety, and difficulty sleeping.<sup>4</sup>

It's vital that you speak to your GP if your mental health worsens, or if you have any concerns. Your GP is there to support your physical and mental health.

To manage your mental health and wellbeing:

- maintain a healthy, balanced diet and stay well hydrated, which helps your body fight illness and recover sooner
- limit your exposure to news and information about COVID-19 to just once a day from trustworthy and credible sources – excessive exposure can often make you feel anxious<sup>5</sup>
- reach out to family and friends – maintaining social connections is important and helps you feel supported and cared for
- focus on self-care – schedule time to do things you find enjoyable and relaxing. Practise mindfulness techniques, such as breathing exercises and meditation.



## Easing muscle and joint pain

Moving regularly helps keep your muscles and joints in good condition. If you're recovering from COVID-19, you probably haven't been as active as you would typically be when in good health. This lack of activity can lead to muscle and joint pain.<sup>6</sup>

Your GP can help you reduce muscle and joint pain by suggesting exercises that improve muscle strength and, ultimately, your ability to move painlessly.

## Returning to exercise

Before returning to exercise, talk to your GP. You should seek their advice on when to start and what kind of exercise will work best for you in your recovery.

You'll need to introduce exercise into your weekly plans slowly and carefully to keep yourself safe.

Only attempt exercises recommended to you by your GP or another appropriate health professional who is aware of your recovery status.

## Maintaining a healthy diet

You may lose your appetite, and your senses of taste and smell might be weakened. However, you need to maintain good nutrition and hydration during your recovery from COVID-19.

Even if you don't feel hungry or thirsty, it's important to continue to eat and drink regularly throughout the day. Your GP can give you essential diet advice and refer you to a dietician, if necessary.

*Tip: Remember to use grocery and food-delivery services, which will help you save your energy.*

## Stopping smoking

COVID-19 and smoking both cause significant harm to your immune system and lungs. Smoking while you recover from COVID-19 places extra strain on your body, increases your risk of infection and slows down your recovery.<sup>1,7</sup>

Quitting smoking has immediate and long-term benefits, including increasing your life expectancy.<sup>8</sup> Talk to your GP about a quit plan and strategies for managing your smoking triggers and barriers to your success. It's never too late to quit.

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## My post-COVID-19 symptom diary

Work with your GP to list your symptoms in the table below.

Every 2–3 days, or as often as your GP recommends, rank each symptom’s severity on a scale of 0–10 (0 meaning no impact and 10 meaning severe).

Use the comments section to add any significant changes in your symptoms or concerns you’d like to discuss with your GP.

Date	Symptom	On a scale of 0–10, how severe is this symptom today? (0 being no symptoms and 10 being severe)										Comments	
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9		10
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		



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