



How to Support Your Recovery and Rehabilitation after COVID-19

Welcome

Having COVID-19 and its long-term effects can be hard. You are not alone, support is available for you and your loved ones.

You may have questions about how to manage the lingering effects of COVID-19 and what you should do to take care of yourself or a loved one.

This resource offers:

- Advice on common symptoms people may have after COVID-19
- What you can do to manage your symptoms and support your recovery
- Advice about who to call to get help from a healthcare provider
- Links to other helpful sources of information

Everyone is unique, some things listed in this resource may not relate to your experience or the experience of a loved one. Focus on the topics that are most important to you. Read this resource in any order you choose and skip to the section that interests you. Taking action in one area may help you or your loved one manage in other areas. Move on to other topics when you feel you or your loved one have made progress in an area or when you are ready.

Below are some icons that will help you use this resource:



Provides ideas on what you can do at home



Services to call when you need more support



Websites you can visit to find more resources or services



Keywords or phrases you can use for your own internet search to find local information



Signs that it is important for you to contact your doctor or rehabilitation professional if the concern worsens or does not get better



Self-Management

Self-management means you make a plan to improve your health. This is important to help you recover from COVID and help you get back to the things you need and want to do.

Self-management includes:

- keeping an eye on your symptoms,
- understanding your treatment options, and
- trying to reduce the impact your illness has on you physically, emotionally, and socially.

Successful self-management means you are in charge and you work with your doctor and health care providers. Together, you make a plan to improve your health and wellbeing. You and your team then follow that plan.

This resource provides information to help **you and your loved ones** understand the effects of COVID-19, and better cope with the health challenges that some people have with COVID-19.



Source:

AHS Primary Health Care: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/hp/phc/if-hp-phc-self-mgt-gen-tips-supporting.pdf>

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Who will benefit from this resource?

This booklet is meant to help people who are recovering from COVID-19 and are having some ongoing health problems. This information will help you with your recovery. If you are worried about your recovery, or if you need help with a topic that is not covered in this resource, or, please **speak to your primary care provider or a rehabilitation professional such as an occupational therapist or physical therapist.**

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The advice and exercises in this resource should not replace any exercise program or advice given by a healthcare provider.



Managing Shortness of Breath

It is common to have shortness of breath after COVID-19. Losing strength and fitness while you were unwell, and the illness itself can make you feel short of breath. This can make you feel anxious, which can make it worse. Staying calm and learning the best way to manage your shortness of breath can help.

Your shortness of breath should improve as you slowly increase your activities. While you recover, the positions and techniques below can also help to manage your shortness of breath.



If you have severe difficulty breathing (e.g., struggling for each breath, speaking in single words, have severe chest pain, have a very hard time waking up, are feeling confused or have lost consciousness call 911.



If you feel short of breath (difficult to catch your breath) and it does not get better with these positions or techniques, contact your doctor Health Link (811).



Positions to Ease Shortness of Breath

Try slow, controlled breaths in any of these positions

High Side Lying

Lay on your side propped up by a pillow, supporting your head and neck with your knees slightly bent.



Forward Lean Sitting

Sit at a table, lean forwards from the waist with your head and neck resting on a pillow and your arms resting on the table. You can also try this without a pillow.



Forward Lean Sitting with no Table in Front

Sit on a chair, lean forwards to rest your arms on your lap or the armrests of the chair.



Forward Lean Standing

While standing, lean forwards onto a windowsill or other stable surface.



Standing with Back Support

While standing, lean with your back against a wall and your hands by your side. Have your feet about a foot away from the wall and slightly apart.





Breathing Techniques

Pursed-lip breathing: helps you breathe more air out so that your next breath can be deeper. It makes you less short of breath and lets you exercise more.

- ✓ Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth while pursing your lips, as if you were about to blow out candles on a cake.
- ✓ Breathe in for about 2 seconds and breathe out for 4-6 seconds

Diaphragmatic breathing: is a type of a breathing exercise that helps strengthen your diaphragm, an important muscle that helps you breathe. It can also help you relax and reduce stress.

- ✓ Sit or lay in a comfortable and supported position.
- ✓ Put one hand on your chest and the other on your belly.
- ✓ If it helps you to relax, close your eyes (otherwise leave them open) and focus on your breathing.
- ✓ Slowly breathe in through your nose (or mouth if you are unable to easily breathe with your nose) then out through your mouth.
- ✓ When you breathe in, push your belly out as far as possible.
- ✓ When you breathe out, you should feel the hand on your belly move in.
- ✓ Try to use as little effort as possible and make your breaths slow, relaxed, and smooth.



Paced Breathing: this is useful to practice when carrying out tasks that might take more effort or make you feel short of breath, like climbing the stairs or walking up a hill. It is important to remember that there is no need to rush.

- ✓ Think about doing the hardest tasks in a part of your day when you have the most energy.
- ✓ Breathe in before you make the 'effort' of the task, such as before you climb up a step.
- ✓ Breathe out while making the effort, such as climbing up a step.

- ✓ You may find it helpful to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth, using the [pursed lip breathing technique](#).
- ✓ Make sure not to hold your breath when doing tasks.



If you have severe difficulty breathing (e.g., struggling for each breath, speaking in single words, have severe chest pain, have a very hard time waking up, are feeling confused or have lost consciousness call 911.



If you feel short of breath (difficult to catch your breath) and it does not get better with these positions or techniques, contact your doctor Health Link 811.



Sources:

- My Health Alberta: Health Information and Tools > COPD: Learning to Breathe Easier
<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/health/pages/conditions.aspx?hwid=zx3179&lang=en-ca#zx3180>
- Health Information and Tools > Patient Care Handouts > Breathing Techniques for COPD: Care Instructions
<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/health/AfterCareInformation/pages/conditions.aspx?HwId=zc1915>

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Managing a Persistent Cough



How to Manage a Dry Cough

- ✓ Drink plenty of fluids as they make a scratchy throat feel better and keeps mucus thin.
- ✓ Raise your head with an extra pillow if coughing keeps you awake at night.
- ✓ Don't smoke or expose yourself to second-hand smoke. Smoke can irritate your lungs and make you cough more. This is very important when you have an illness that can affect your breathing, like COVID-19.
- ✓ Try taking cough medicine if you have a dry, hacking cough, it may help to stop the cough reflex. Ask your pharmacist which one is right for you. Children under 6 years should not use cough medicine.
- ✓ Soothe a sore throat by sucking on throat lozenges or plain, hard candy. Don't give lozenges to children under 6 years.



Health Link 811 for additional support



How to Manage a Productive Cough

You might find you are coughing up mucus or phlegm (also called a productive cough). This is normal after a respiratory illness like COVID-19.

Coughing is how your body tries to get rid of mucus. Coughing that you are unable to control makes things worse and could make you feel very tired.

A controlled cough loosens mucus from deep in your lungs and moves it through your airways. It is best to do it after you use your medicine or inhaler, if you have one prescribed.

- ✓ If you use an inhaler, continue to use it as directed by your primary care provider.



My Health Alberta - How to Use an Inhaler Correctly

<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Health/pages/conditions.aspx?hwid=sti150732&https://myhealth.alberta.ca/health/medications/Pages/default.aspx>



How to Control Your Cough

Follow these steps to help control your cough:

- ✓ Sit on the edge of a chair, and keep both feet on the floor.
- ✓ Lean forward a little, and relax.
- ✓ Breathe in slowly through your nose, and fold your arms over your belly.
- ✓ As you exhale, lean forward. Push your arms against your belly.
- ✓ Cough 2 or 3 times as you exhale with your mouth slightly open. Make the coughs short and sharp. Push on your belly with your arms as you cough. The first cough brings the mucus through your lung airways. The next coughs bring it up and out of your lungs.
- ✓ Inhale again, but this time, do it slowly and gently through your nose. Do not take quick or deep breaths through your mouth. Doing this can block the mucus coming out of your lungs and can cause uncontrolled coughing.
- ✓ Rest, and repeat if you need to.



Health Link 811 for additional support or speak with a physiotherapist or respiratory therapist.



Sources:

My Health Alberta

- Health Information and Tools > Health A-Z > COVID-19: How To Manage Symptoms
<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Alberta/Pages/How-to-manage-symptoms.aspx>
- Health Information and Tools > COPD: Clearing Your Lungs
<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/health/pages/conditions.aspx?Hwid=za1357>

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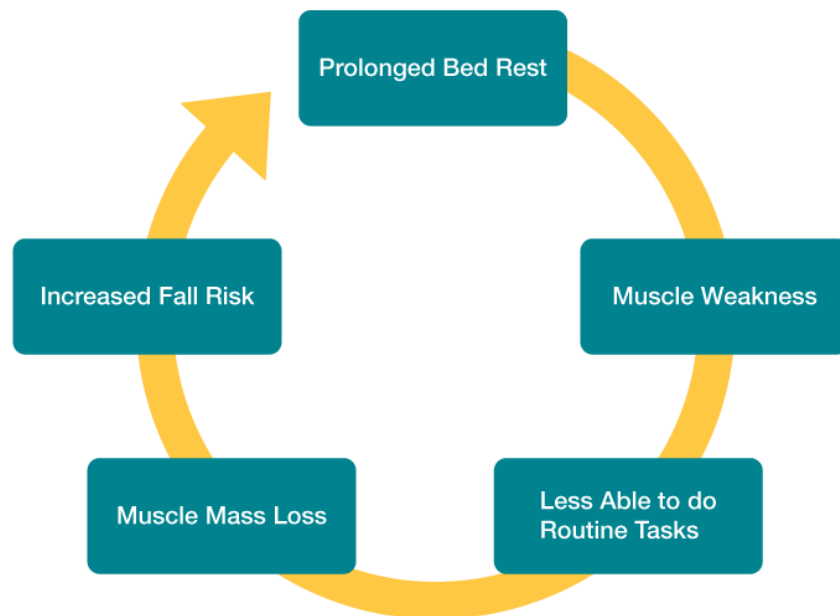
Managing Activities of Daily Living

- ✓ It is important to gradually start moving again after you have been ill.
- ✓ Increasing activity and movement can be difficult when you feel very tired, short of breath, and weak.

As soon as you can, try to get out of bed and start getting dressed again. This will help your physical and mental health.

There are great risks to staying in bed. The biggest one is deconditioning. Deconditioning is a medical term for not moving your body for a day or more, which can be very harmful to your health.

Deconditioning can affect our muscle strength, our energy levels, and our heart and lung health. Deconditioning can happen quickly if we don't move, and it can take a long time to get your strength back. The best way to prevent deconditioning is to stay active and move our bodies regularly. So, try to move as much as you safely can when you are recovering from COVID.



Source:

AHS End PJ Paralysis:

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/Page16913.aspx>



Managing Activities of Daily Living

After an illness, you may not have the same energy you did before you were sick, and some tasks may take more effort than before.

Getting out of bed, getting dressed, and getting back into a basic routine will help prevent deconditioning, and may help your mood too. Basic routines include washing your face, brushing your teeth, getting dressed, going to the kitchen for meals, and putting on pajamas at bedtime.

Everything we do takes energy, including washing, dressing, and preparing meals. It is okay if getting out of bed and getting dressed is all you have energy to do that day.



If you feel that you do not have energy to do your daily tasks, please see the [Conserving your Energy](#) section of this document for strategies.



If problems persist, contact your primary care provider, a physiotherapist or an occupational therapist.



Rehabilitation Advice Line 1-833-379-0563



Source:

WHO Support for Rehabilitation Self-Management Following COVID-19 Related Illness

<https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/support-for-rehabilitation-self-management-after-covid-19-related-illness>



Conserving Energy

What does it mean to conserve energy?

Cooking dinner, putting away laundry, getting dressed, or even just walking across your living room can be tiring after an illness like COVID-19. You may find it hard to do the everyday tasks you used to do.

Saving your energy means finding ways of doing daily tasks with as little effort as possible. With some planning and tips, you can get tasks done more easily and enjoy your daily routine.

How can you save energy in daily activities?

Plan

Try to create a plan for the activities you need to do. Remember to include rest breaks.

Take time each evening to review what you did during the day and plan the next day.

Gather everything you need before you start a task.

Spread physically or mental demanding tasks out over the week.

Plan to do harder tasks when you feel the strongest and are most refreshed.

Pace

Work for short periods of time.

Give yourself lots of time to do each task.

Include rest periods or breaks during the day.

Balance activities with rest breaks. Rest **before** you feel tired.

Break up large tasks by doing a little bit each day.

Switch between heavy and light tasks

Switch between tasks that use your body and those that use your mind.

Prioritize Decide what is most important to you.

Ask or let other people help you when possible.

Be sure to include activities you enjoy.

Position Sit down when able.

Push or slide objects instead of lifting.

Put commonly used items in easy-to-reach locations (between hip and shoulder height).

Avoid long periods of squatting, bending over, or stooping.

Getting Around and Doing Activities

Move slowly when you walk or do an activity such as housework.

Sit down (on a chair or high stool) as often as you can when you get dressed, do chores, or cook. For example, chop vegetables sitting at the kitchen table.

Consider using a raised toilet seat if getting up and down from a low toilet is difficult. See the [Adaptive Equipment](#) section for more information.

Sit down on a shower chair when bathing. See the [Adaptive Equipment](#) section for more information.

Use a cart with wheels to roll items, such as laundry, from one room to another.

Push or slide boxes or other large items instead of lifting them.

Limit the trips you take up stairs. For example, leave a pile of items at the bottom of the stairs, and take them up at the end of the night, or ask a family member to go upstairs for you.

Consider sleeping on the main floor of your home if there is more than one level.

Reaching and Grabbing Items

- ✓ Put things you use the most on shelves that are between waist and shoulder height. Bending down and reaching up can make you tired quickly, especially if you have trouble breathing.
- ✓ Use long-handled grabbers or other tools to reach items on a high shelf or to pick up items off the floor.
- ✓ Use long-handled dusters when you clean the house.
- ✓ Consider leaving frequently used items (e.g. toaster) on the counter instead of putting them away every day.

Showering and Dressing

- ✓ Consider sitting on a shower chair or stool while you bathe. See [Adaptive Equipment](#) section for more information.
- ✓ Sit down while you brush your teeth, shave, or put on makeup.
- ✓ Shower with warm water rather than hot water. Steam can make it harder to breathe for some people.
- ✓ Wear tops and sweaters that have zippers or buttons so you don't have to pull them over your head.

Being Intimate

- ✓ Choose the time of day when you have more energy.
- ✓ Different positions for sex can be less tiring. You may want to focus more on caressing.
- ✓ You may want to let your partner (if they do not have any problems with energy or shortness of breath) to take on a more active role.

Adaptive Equipment and Devices

There are many pieces of equipment that may help you save your energy. These can include common household items such as non-stick cookware, an electric can opener, stand mixer, hands free phone or headset, or food processor.

There is also rehabilitation equipment that can help if you're struggling with your day to day activities.

Rehabilitation equipment includes:

Raised toilet seat and armrests for the toilet – this will make it easier to sit down and stand up when you use the toilet

Bath seat or bench – this is specially designed sturdy seat you can safely use in a bath tub or walk-in shower. It will allow you to sit down while showering to make it easier.

4 wheeled walker – is a walking frame with 4 wheels, brakes and a seat. It will help you keep your balance when you walk, and has a seat to let you rest whenever you need to when you.

You can rent most of this equipment from a medical vendor.

Tools for Grooming and Dressing

Examples include:

- ✓ Tub or shower grab bars. They can help you get in and out of the bathtub.
- ✓ Tools to help you get dressed. These include button or zipper hooks, shoehorns, and sock aids.
- ✓ Electric toothbrushes and combs, and brushes that have big handles. They are easier to hold.
- ✓ Long-handled sponges for bathing.
- ✓ Velcro fasteners on clothes instead of small buttons or snaps.
- ✓ Large pull tabs on zippers. These make zippers easier to hold and pull.



© 2016 Healthwise

Tools for Daily Chores

These tools include:

- ✓ Try using objects on wheels, such as stools, carts, and trashcans that can be pushed rather than carried or lifted.
- ✓ Doorknob extenders. They help you open doors without twisting the doorknob.
- ✓ Molded or padded handles. They can make objects like keys, kitchen gadgets, combs, mirrors, and toothbrushes easier to hold.
- ✓ Reaching or grabbing tools. You can use them to help you pick up items from the floor or from a high shelf.
- ✓ Writing and reading tools, such as grips on pens or a magnifying glass can help you.
- ✓



Tools for Getting Around

Examples include:

- ✓ Movement devices, such as canes, braces, walkers, and electric scooters. Wheelchairs can also keep you mobile.
- ✓ Raised toilet seats, with or without rails, to help you sit and stand. They can make it safer and easier to use the toilet.
- ✓ Attached special lifts to your bed, car, or bathtub to help you get in and out.



Other Adaptive Equipment

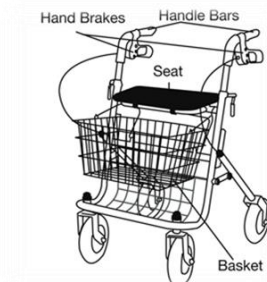
Raised Toilet Seat with Arm Rests



Bath Seat or Bench



Wheeled Walker



Images used with permission from www.redcross.ca

Many communities also have short term Red Cross Loan Cupboards to borrow equipment. Speak to your local healthcare provider about how to access this equipment short term, if you think you need it. You can call the Rehabilitation Advice Line for help find a vendor.

Ease back into activities. Do not try to take up full activities until you feel ready. This may mean talking to an employer about a gradual return to work, taking on a role that is easier for you to manage, getting support for childcare, and returning to hobbies slowly.



Rehabilitation Advice Line 1-833-379-0563



Medical equipment vendors in your city/town



<https://www.redcross.ca/how-we-help/community-health-services-in-canada/alberta-health-equipment-loan-program>



Source:

My Health Alberta:

- Health Information and Tools > Conserving Energy When You Have COPD or Other Chronic Conditions
<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/health/pages/conditions.aspx?Hwid=abp2734>
- Home > Early Concussion Education > Pacing and Energy Conservation
<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Learning/early-concussion/pacing-and-energy-conservation>



Managing Eating, Drinking and Swallowing

If you were hospitalized for COVID-19 you may have had a breathing tube attached to a ventilator. If you did, you may notice you have some difficulty swallowing food, drinks or pills, and medicine. This is because the muscles that help with swallowing may have become weak. When swallowing muscles are weak, your body has trouble protecting your airway from food, drinks, or saliva.

Swallowing difficulties puts you at higher risk for choking and lung infections. This can happen if food or fluid goes into your airway or your lungs when you swallow, instead of to your stomach through the esophagus (the tube that connects your throat to your stomach).

Eating well and drinking enough fluids are important to help you recover from COVID-19.



If you have swallowing difficulties, try some of these safe swallowing tips to help you get enough nutrition safely:

- ✓ Sit upright whenever you eat or drink. Never eat or drink while lying down.
- ✓ Remain upright (seated, standing, or walking) for at least 30 minutes after meals.
- ✓ Some foods are easier to swallow than others. It may help to choose soft, smooth, or moist foods at first, or to chop-up food into very small pieces.
- ✓ Avoid being distracted while eating, such as watching TV, reading, or talking. Try to have your meals in a quiet place.
- ✓ Take your time when eating and drinking. Take small bites of food. Chew your food well before you swallow. Take small sips of your drink between bites of food.
- ✓ Make sure your mouth is clear before taking another bite or sip. If you need to, swallow again.
- ✓ Eat when you feel alert and well rested.
- ✓ Eat small meals throughout the day if you get tired eating full meals.
- ✓ If you cough or choke, or your breathing becomes difficult when you eat and drink, take a break to recover.

Eating healthy foods is important to your recovery, especially when you are weak or have been on a ventilator.

To reduce your risk of getting an infection if food, fluid, or saliva enters your airway, brush your teeth after every meal and stay hydrated. This will help to make sure your mouth stays healthy.



If you experience any of the following despite following the safe swallowing tips, please contact your Primary Care Provider or a **Speech-Language Pathologist**:

- Coughing or choking when eating or drinking
- A wet sounding voice after eating or drinking
- New, frequent chest infections
- Feeling like things are sticking in your throat while eating or drinking

For more information about Safe Eating, Drinking and Swallowing:



Health Link 811 and ask to speak to a dietitian
Rehabilitation Advice Line 1-833-379-0563



Alberta Referral Directory: www.albertareferraldirectory.ca



My Health Alberta > Feeding and Swallowing Problems:
<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/HealthTopics/speech-language-hearing/Pages/feeding-swallowing-problems.aspx>



Managing Your Nutrition

Food provides energy for our bodies. It's important to keep eating and drinking during and after illness.

To get the nutrition you need, eat a variety of foods each day, such as:

- ✓ Protein foods like meat, poultry, fish, eggs, dairy, legumes (beans), and pulses (lentils and peas). Our bodies need protein to maintain and rebuild tissues, including muscles.
- ✓ Fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. These foods give you lots of vitamins, minerals, and fiber to help your body recover from illness.
- ✓ Healthy fats, including nuts and seeds, olive oil, fatty fish like salmon, and avocado, help to give you energy and nutrition your body needs to recover.
- ✓ Fluids, including water, coffee or tea, milk or plant-based beverages, sports drinks, and nutrition supplement drinks can help you stay hydrated. Getting enough fluids daily is important, especially if you've been sick with fever, vomiting, or diarrhea.



Tips to help you eat and drink when you have low energy or are feeling extra tired:

- ✓ Take small bites so it's easier to breathe while you eat.
- ✓ Eat slowly, and stop for a few moments between bites to catch your breath.
- ✓ Eat 5 – 6 small meals throughout the day instead of 3 larger meals.
- ✓ If you are too tired to regularly finish your meals or snacks, have food and drinks that are higher in energy (calories) and protein. Examples include adding Greek or Icelandic yogurt to smoothies, putting avocado on a sandwich, or adding grated cheese or nut butter to foods.
- ✓ Drink fluids after meals to avoid filling up too quickly.
- ✓ Sip small amounts of fluids if you need to drink while you eat.
- ✓ Snack every 2 – 3 hours, even if you don't feel hungry.
- ✓ Add nutrition supplement drinks, bars, or puddings to meals or snacks to get extra energy and protein.

Meal Planning:

- ✓ Planning meals ahead helps you make healthier food choices every day. It can also save time, money, and trips to the grocery store.
- ✓ Plan a menu for a few days or for the week. To help plan meals and snacks, use the [Weekly Menu Planner](#) and [Healthy Grocery List](#).
- ✓ Group your grocery items according to aisles of the grocery store to make grocery shopping easier.
- ✓ Choose vegetables and fruits that are fresh, frozen, or canned.
- ✓ Pre-cook meat or poultry, then portion and freeze. You can use the thawed meat in wraps, tacos, spaghetti sauce, or fried rice to save time.
- ✓ Make extra rice or noodles, then refrigerate or freeze in a plastic bag or airtight container for another day.

Food Access:

- ✓ The COVID-19 pandemic has made accessing food for some more difficult.
- ✓ 211 Alberta is a provincial directory for programs and services that can help you access programs or services to help.
 - Options to contact 211 are:
 - by phone or chat: dial 2-1-1
 - text INFO to 211
 - visit ab.211.ca and click “live chat”



Meals on Wheels™ may be available in your town or city.

They provide hot or frozen meals and can help if you are having money troubles. Special health-and diet-related funding may be available.

- ✓ <https://www.mealsonwheels.com/> (Calgary)
- ✓ <https://mealsonwheelsedmonton.org/> (Edmonton)
- ✓ <http://www.mealsonwheelslethbridge.ca/> (Lethbridge)
- ✓ <https://www.medicinehat.ca/government/departments/community-development/community-support/meals-on-wheels> (Medicine Hat)
- ✓ <http://www.reddeermealsonwheels.com> (Red Deer)
- ✓ <https://www.gpcouncilonaging.com/mowhome.html> (Grand Prairie)

Search **Inform Alberta** for all other Meals on Wheels™ programs in the province



Heart to Home Meals™ may be available for older adults living in select locations in Alberta.

<https://www.hearttohomemeals.ca/>



Food Banks are available for temporary relief
[www.https://foodbanksalberta.ca/](https://foodbanksalberta.ca/)



If getting enough nutrition is difficult after following these tips, contact your primary care provider or connect with a **Registered Dietitian**.



Health Link 811 and ask to speak to a dietitian



Community and Social Services Help Line 211



<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/Page16475.aspx>
Canada Food Guide > <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>



Source:

My Health Alberta:

- Health Information and Tools > Nutrition and Physical Activity
<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/health/pages/conditions.aspx?Hwid=ta1294>
- AHS Home > Nutrition > Healthy Eating Resources > Nutrition Education Materials
<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/nutrition/Page11115.aspx>

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Getting Restful Sleep

Different people need different amounts of sleep. When recovering from illness, it's normal to need more sleep. You might need to take rests or a nap during the day - that's okay. Your body is working hard to try to recover.

The number of hours you sleep is not as important as how you feel when you wake up. If you do not feel refreshed, you probably need more sleep.

Establish a routine to promote good sleep habits:

- ✓ Plan a set time to go to bed and time to wake up in the morning. Stick to them even on weekends. This will help your body get used to a regular sleep pattern.
- ✓ Give yourself time to wind down and relax toward the end of the day.
- ✓ Take a warm bath before bed.
- ✓ Keep your bedroom dark, cool, and quiet.
- ✓ Remove distractions, such as a television, computer or tablet, clock, smart phone or telephone, or radio from your bedroom.
- ✓ Use a humidifier or "white noise" machine to block out background noise in your bedroom throughout the night.
- ✓ Try using a sleep mask and earplugs at night.
- ✓ If you take medicine that may keep you awake, such as allergy medicines, decongestants, or asthma medicines, take them as long before bedtime as possible.
- ✓ Reserve the bedroom for sleeping so that you come to associate it with sleep. Go to another room to read, watch television, or eat.
- ✓ After getting into bed, try to let your muscles relax. It may help you relax if you imagine yourself in a peaceful, pleasant scene.

When you can't fall asleep, try the following:

- ✓ If you are still awake after 15 or 20 minutes, get up and read in dim light or do a boring task until you feel drowsy. Don't lay in bed and think about how much sleep you're missing or watch TV.

Avoid activities that might keep you from a good night's sleep:

- ✓ Avoid food and drinks with caffeine after 3:00 p.m. This includes coffee, tea, cola drinks, and chocolate.
- ✓ Do not smoke or use other tobacco products. Nicotine can disrupt sleep and reduce total sleep time. Smokers report more daytime sleepiness and minor accidents than do non-smokers, especially in younger age groups.



For more information, see the topic [Quitting Smoking](#) on My Health Alberta.

- ✓ Avoid drinking alcohol. It may make you sleepy but may also wake you up after a short time.
- ✓ Avoid sleeping too much during the day. Naps are okay as you recover, but if you're starting to have difficulty sleeping at night it might be time to reduce your naps during the day.



If getting enough sleep continues to be difficult, contact your primary care provider, talk to your pharmacist, or speak to a registered nurse at Health Link.



Health Link 811



[30 days to a well-rested you](#) (activity)
[Sleep journal](#) (activity)



Source:

My Health Alberta:

- Health Information and Tools > Sleep Problems
<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/health/pages/conditions.aspx?hwid=slppb&lang=en-ca#aa2209>

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Managing Changes with your Thinking (Attention, Memory)

It is common for people who have been unwell with COVID to experience new challenges with

- thinking,
- memory, and
- focusing or paying attention.

These challenges may go away within weeks or last for months.

It is important for you and your family to recognize if you are having these challenges. They can have an impact on your relationships, daily tasks, and your return to work or school.

If you experience these challenges, it may help:

- ✓ Exercise and activity can help your brain recover. Exercise may be difficult if you feel weak, are short of breath, or tire easily. Slowly, try to add gentle exercises into your daily routine. See some suggestions in the [Exercise](#) section to help you get started.
- ✓ Try to exercise your brain! Try new hobbies or activities, puzzles, word and number games, memory games, and reading. Start with tasks that challenge you to think but are doable. Slowly increase the level of difficulty when you feel ready. This can help keep you inspired.
- ✓ Make with lists, notes, and alerts (e.g. set an alarm on your phone), that can remind you of what you need to do.
- ✓ Break down tasks into small steps to make them easier to complete.

Some of the ideas covered in the [Energy Conservation](#) and [Return to Work](#) sections may also help you manage the impact of problems with attention, memory, and thinking clearly, such as adjusting your hopes and letting others help you.



If the changes with your memory or thinking continue to be difficult, contact your primary care provider or speak to a physiotherapist or occupational therapist.



Rehabilitation Advice Line
1-833-379-0563

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Managing Stress, Anxiety or Depression

Being unwell can be a highly stressful. It can change your mood. It is common to have feelings of stress, anxiety (worry, fear) or depression (low mood, sadness). If you were in the hospital, memories or dreams of being in the hospital may come to you even if you do not want them to. Your mood may also be affected by frustrations about not yet being able to return to your daily tasks the way you would like to.

Managing stress and feelings of anxiety and depression are an important part of your recovery.

You can try these things to help you feel better.

Take Care of Your Basic Needs

- ✓ Get 7-8 hours of sleep a night. Please refer to the [Getting Restful Sleep](#) section of this resource for more information.
- ✓ Eating well is important for your recovery and wellbeing. If you struggle with eating or swallowing, follow the advice provided in the [Eating, Drinking, and Swallowing](#) section.
- ✓ It's okay to ask for help. Ask family and caregivers to grocery shop, prepare meals, or bring you snacks. Please refer to the [Managing Your Nutrition](#) section of this resource for more information.
- ✓ Exercise and activity can help lower stress and can reduce the chance of depression. Take small steps to safely increase your activity level.

Self-Care

- ✓ Staying socially connected is important for your mental well-being. Talking with others can help reduce stress and may help you find solutions in your recovery.
- ✓ If you live alone, stay in contact with friends or family online or through the telephone.
- ✓ When your mood is low, you may not feel like being social. Let family and friends know that they can help by reaching out to you during your recovery even if you don't always accept their online meeting invitations or calls right away.
- ✓ Try relaxing activities that do not make you too tired, like listening to music, reading, or spiritual practices.
- ✓ Slow breathing exercises can help to reduce stress and can be used to help you relax. These exercises should be done gradually if it is too difficult at first. Refer to the section on [Breathing Techniques](#) for more information.
- ✓ Gradually increase your daily activities or hobbies to the best of your ability, as this helps to improve your mood.



Spiritual Practice Worksheets Activity >

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/amh/if-amh-mhpiip-spiritual-practices-workbook.pdf>

If you were receiving mental health support before your illness, talk to your provider to continue to access this support. Many health care teams are offering online or telephone options during the COVID pandemic.

Family and caregivers can play an important role in your recovery. They can help you access the support you need, when you need it.



If you are struggling with Stress, Anxiety or Depression, help is available 24 hours a day. Contact a helpline or contact your primary care provider.



Mental Health Help Line (24 hours): 1-877-303-2642
Distress Centre Calgary (24 hours): 403-266-4357 (HELP)
Distress Centre Edmonton (24 hours): 1-780-482-4357 (HELP)



Addictions Services Help Line (24 hours): 1-866-332-2322



Community and Social Services Help Line: 211



AHS Mental Health Resources

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page17311.aspx>

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Loss of Taste and Smell

You may notice a loss of smell and taste after your COVID-19 illness. The sense of smell is closely tied to the sense of taste.

If you can't smell food, you will likely have trouble tasting the food. Loss of smell or taste can lead to a low appetite, and might cause you to eat less. This puts you at risk for not getting enough nutrition and may cause you to lose weight without meaning to.



Here are some tips to help support your nutrition when you have changes in smell or taste

- ✓ Prepare colorful food.
- ✓ Use strong flavors, such as cinnamon, chili, mustard, or vinegar. Avoid adding too much salt or sugar as too much can make some health problems worse.
- ✓ Try food at different temperatures, such as hot, room temperature, and cold.
- ✓ Explore using different food textures, such as crunchy or soft. If you are having trouble swallowing, please see the [Managing Eating, Drinking and Swallowing](#) section.
- ✓ Avoid distractions while eating, such as watching TV or listening to music. Try to focus on the taste, texture, and sight of your food.



Sources:

My Health Alberta

- Health Information and Tools > Anosmia (Loss of Smell)
<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/health/pages/conditions.aspx?Hwid=abl0388>
- Health Information and Tools > Taste Changes
<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/health/pages/conditions.aspx?Hwid=sig258433>

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Managing Joint and Muscle Pain



The advice below is only if you are having general muscle and joint pain. If you have had any sort of injury causing muscle or joint pain, please contact your family doctor or Health Link. You can also speak to a physiotherapist or occupational therapist.



Health Link 811
Rehabilitation Advice Line 1-833-379-0563

You might have joint or muscle pain after your illness. One or more areas of your body may ache or burn, or they may feel tired, stiff, or sore.

Staying in bed for more than a couple of days can lead to problems such as stiff joints and muscle weakness.

Once you're able to get out of bed, make sure you avoid sitting or lying in one position for long periods of time.

Changing positions often (for example, once an hour) will help prevent you from becoming stiff. To encourage you to change positions, get up to go to the washroom, grab a drink from the kitchen, or go to look out a window.

Doing gentle stretches to start to move your joints and muscles again can help you manage your pain.

Heat

- ✓ Apply heat for 15 to 20 minutes at a time. Moist heat (hot packs, baths, or showers) works better than dry heat.
- ✓ Try an all-day heat wrap, available in pharmacies.
- ✓ If you are using an electric heating pad, avoid falling asleep while the pad is on. If you think you might fall asleep, set an alarm clock to go off in 20 minutes. Use heating pads set on low or medium, never on high.

Ice

- ✓ Use a commercial cold pack
- ✓ An ice towel. Wet a towel with cold water, and squeeze it until it is just damp. Fold the towel, place it in a plastic bag, and freeze it for 15 minutes. Remove the towel from the bag, and place it on the area that hurts.
- ✓ An ice pack. Put about 2 cups of ice in a plastic bag. Add water to barely cover the ice. Squeeze the air out of the bag and seal it. Wrap the bag in a towel and apply it to the affected area.
- ✓ You can also use a bag of frozen vegetables wrapped in a towel.

See 'warm ups' and 'cool down' in the [Exercise](#) section for stretching ideas.

Some people find that **heat or ice** can help with lower their pain. Follow these suggestions if you would like to try heat or cold for joint or muscle pain.

Always keep a damp cloth between your skin and the cold pack.

Do not apply ice for longer than 15 – 20 minutes at a time. Be careful not to fall asleep with a heat source or ice on your skin. Make sure you can feel the heat or cold on the part of the body that you are using the ice pack or heating pad on.

You may want to talk to your primary care provider or pharmacist about taking an over-the-counter pain medicine, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), or naproxen (Aleve).

- Read and follow all instructions on the label.



If you are having pain that concerns you, contact your primary care provider or a health care provider.



Health Link 811
Rehabilitation Advice Line 1-833-379-0563



Sources:

- Health Information and Tools > Patient Care Handouts > Musculoskeletal Pain: Care Instructions
<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/health/AfterCareInformation/pages/conditions.aspx?Hwid=abq3294>
- Health Information and Tools > Health A-Z > Staying Active: Limited Mobility
<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Alberta/Pages/active-limited-mobility.aspx>
- Health Information and Tools > Use Heat or Ice to Relieve Low Back Pain
<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/health/pages/conditions.aspx?Hwid=hw47901>

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Exercising after COVID-19



If you are still struggling with basic tasks (e.g. getting dressed or having a shower) it may be too early to add in strengthening exercises.

You could try slowly adding in the warm up and cool down activities.

Some people that have had COVID-19 find that exercising too hard can make them more tired. Approach exercise very gradually and with caution. Speak with your primary care provider or physiotherapist or occupational therapist for further advice.



Rehabilitation Advice Line 1-833-379-0563



The **Alberta Healthy Living Program (AHLP)** provides services to those with chronic conditions in communities throughout Alberta. These services include information, education, techniques, and support to help improve your health and quality of life with a chronic condition.

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/page13984.aspx>

Exercise is an important part of recovery after COVID-19. Exercise can help to:

- ✓ Improve fitness
- ✓ Reduce shortness of breath
- ✓ Increase muscle strength
- ✓ Improve balance and coordination
- ✓ Improve your thinking
- ✓ Reduce stress and improve mood
- ✓ Increase confidence
- ✓ Improve energy levels

Find a way to stay inspired with your exercises. Keeping track of your progress with a diary or exercise 'app' on your phone or watch may help.



If you feel any of the following symptoms, do not exercise, or stop exercising, and contact your primary care provider:

- ✓ Nausea or feeling sick
- ✓ Dizziness or light headedness
- ✓ Severe shortness of breath
- ✓ Clamminess or sweating
- ✓ Chest tightness
- ✓ Increased pain

Exercising Safely

Exercising safely is important, even if you were able to walk and exercise before becoming sick. It is especially important if you:

- ✓ Found it hard to move around before going into hospital.
- ✓ Had any falls before going into hospital or during your time in hospital.
- ✓ Have any other health condition or injury that may put your health at risk with exercising.
- ✓ Have been discharged from hospital on medically prescribed oxygen.

In these cases, you may need to work with a health care provider to make a plan for safe exercise, and exercise with someone else for safety.

It is very important that anyone on additional oxygen talk to a health care provider before starting to exercise.

Remember to exercise safely by doing the following:

- Always warm-up before exercising, and cool down after exercising.
- Wear loose, comfortable clothing, and supportive shoes.
- Wait at least an hour after a meal before exercising.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Do not exercise in very hot weather.
- Exercise indoors in very cold weather.

Exercising at the Right Level for you

- ✓ To know you are exercising at the right level, think about speaking a sentence:

Too hard – slow down	If you cannot speak at all, or can only say one word at a time, or are feeling short of breath
Just Right – keep going	If you can speak a full sentence, pausing once or twice to catch your breath, and are moderately short of breath
Too easy – speed up a bit	If you can speak a full sentence without stopping and are not feeling short of breath

- ✓ Remember that it is normal to feel short of breath when you exercise, and it is not harmful or dangerous. Gradually building your fitness can help you become less short of breath.
- ✓ If you do feel too short of breath to speak, you should slow down or stop to rest until your breathing feels more controlled. You may find the positions to relieve [Shortness of Breath](#) helpful.

Warm Up Exercises

Warming up gets your body ready for exercise and helps you to avoid injuries. Your warm-up should last around 5 minutes. You can do warm-up exercises sitting or standing. If you do your warm up standing, hold on to a stable surface to keep your balance if you need to. Repeat each movement 2 – 4 times.

Shoulder Shrugs

- ✓ Slowly lift your shoulders towards your ears and then lower them.



Shoulder Circles

- ✓ Keep your arms relaxed by your side or resting on your lap. Slowly move your shoulders in a circle forwards and then in a circle backwards.



Side Bends

- ✓ Start with your body straight and your arms by your sides. Slide one arm, then the other, a short way towards the floor, bending sideways.



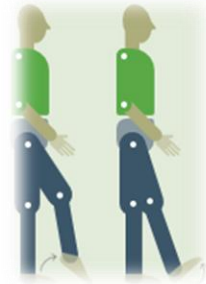
Knee Lifts

- ✓ Lift your knees up and down slowly one at a time. Lift your knees no higher than your hip.



Ankle Taps

- ✓ With one foot, tap your toes then tap your heel on the ground in front of you. Repeat the motion with the other foot.



Ankle Circles

- ✓ Using one foot, draw circles in the air with your toes. Repeat with your other foot.



Exercises

You should aim to build up to do exercise for 20 – 30 minutes, 5 days each week. You may have to start with shorter sessions. You can also try shorter sessions more often in the day.

Some examples of different types of exercises are described below. But any activity that makes you feel a bit to somewhat short of breath can be counted towards your exercise. As you feel better, you can work up to feeling more short of breath as you exercise (if you watch professional athletes, you will see that they can be very short of breath after exercise – that is safe if you work up to it slowly).

Time your exercise and slowly build up the amount of time you can manage. This may be in small increases such as an extra 30 seconds or 1 minute of activity each session. It may take a while to return to the level of activity you were able to do before you became unwell.

Examples of Aerobic Exercises

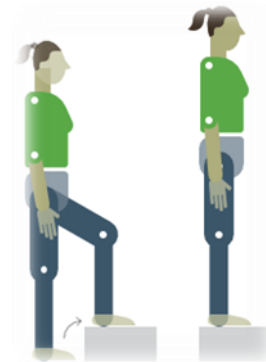
Marching on the Spot

- ✓ If needed, hold onto a stable chair or surface for support. Have a chair nearby to rest.
- ✓ Lift your knees one at a time.
- ✓ If this is easy, try to challenge yourself:
 - Increase the height you lift your legs, aiming to reach hip height if possible
- ✓ Choose this exercise:
 - If you cannot go outside to walk.
 - If you are not able to walk very far before needing to sit down.



Step Ups

- ✓ Use a small step such as the bottom step of a flight of stairs
- ✓ If needed, hold on to the handrail for support. Have a chair nearby to rest.
- ✓ Step up and down; changing the leg you start with every 10 steps.
- ✓ If this is easy, try to challenge yourself:
 - Increase the height of the step, or speed of stepping up and down.
 - If your balance is good enough to do this exercise without holding on, then you can carry weights as you step up and down.
- ✓ Choose this exercise:
 - If you cannot go outside.
 - If you are not able to walk very far before needing to sit down.



Walking

- ✓ Use a walker, crutches, or cane if needed.
- ✓ Choose a route that is fairly flat
- ✓ If this is easy, try to challenge yourself:
 - Increasing the speed or distance you walk, or if nearby, include walking uphill in your route
- ✓ Choose this exercise:
 - If you can get outdoors to exercise

Jogging or Cycling

- ✓ Only jog or cycle if it is medically safe for you
- ✓ Choose this exercise:
 - If walking is not making you out of breath enough
 - If you could jog or cycle before you became unwell

Examples of Strengthening Exercises

Strengthening exercises will help improve muscles that have become weaker as a result of your illness. You should aim to work up to doing three sessions of strengthening exercise each week. Strengthening exercises will not make you feel short of breath in the same way as exercises. Instead, your muscles will feel like they have worked hard.

You should aim to work up to completing up to 3 sets of 10 reps of each exercise, taking a short rest in between each set. Do not worry if you find these exercises hard. If you do, start with a smaller number of repetitions in each set and build up to achieving sets of 10. As you get better with the exercises, use heavier weights to make your muscles work harder. You can use cans of food or bottles of water as weights.

Some strengthening exercises for your arms and legs are described below, which can be done in sitting or standing. These can be done in any order. Keep a good posture, with your back straight and your tummy tucked in, and complete the exercises slowly.

Remember to breathe in during the easier part of the exercise and breathe out as you do the harder part (for example in the arm curl above, breath out as you bring the weight up, and breath in as you lower the weight back down).

Examples of strengthening exercises for your arms:

Bicep Curl

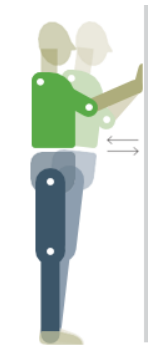
- ✓ With your arms by your side, hold a weight in each hand with your palms facing forwards
- ✓ Keep the top part of your arm still. Gently bend your elbow to lift the lower part of both arms and bring the weights up.
- ✓ You can do this exercise sitting or standing

If this is easy, try to challenge yourself:

- ✓ Increase the weights you use while doing this exercise.

Wall Push Off

- ✓ Place your hands flat against a wall at shoulder height, with fingers facing upwards, and your feet about a foot away from the wall
- ✓ Keeping your body straight at all times, slowly lower your body towards the wall by bending your elbows, then gently push away from the wall again, until your arms are straight

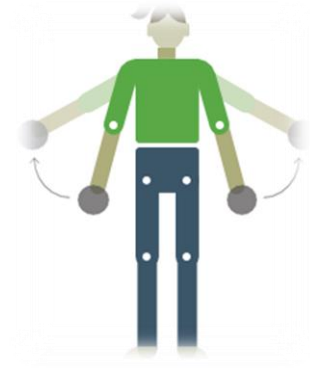


Progressing this exercise:

- ✓ Stand further away from the wall

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, up to your shoulder level (but not higher) and slowly lower back down
- ✓ You can do this exercise sitting or standing
- ✓ If this hurts your shoulders, try it without weights, or try pointing your thumbs out from your body (they will be pointing up to the sky when you get to the top of the movement)



Progressing this exercise:

- ✓ Increase the height that you lift your arms, but no higher than your shoulder level.
- ✓ Increase the weight you use while doing the exercise

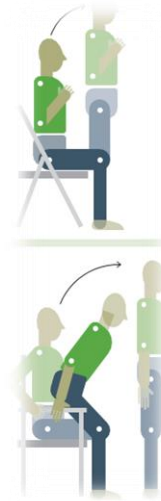
Examples of strengthening exercises for your legs

Sit to Stand

- ✓ Sit with your feet hip-width apart. With your arms by your side or crossed over your chest, slowly stand up, hold the position for the count of 3, and slowly sit back down onto the chair. Keep your feet on the floor throughout
- ✓ If you cannot stand up from the chair without using your arms, try a higher chair. If this is still too hard at first, you may push with your arms

Progressing this exercise:

- ✓ Make the movement as slow as possible
- ✓ Perform the exercise using a lower chair
- ✓ Hold a weight close to your chest whilst doing the exercise



Knee Straightening

- ✓ Sit in a chair with your feet together. Straighten one knee and hold your leg out straight for a moment, then slowly lower it. Repeat with your other leg.

Progressing this exercise:

- ✓ Increase the time holding your leg out straight to a count of 3
- ✓ Perform the exercise more slowly

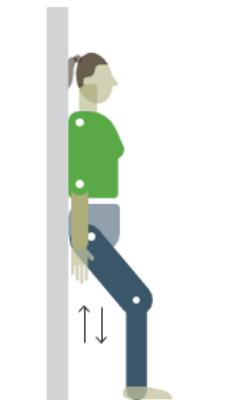


Squats

- ✓ Stand with your back against a wall or other stable surface and your feet slightly apart. Move your feet about a foot away from the wall. Or, rest your hands on the back of a stable chair
- ✓ Keeping your back against the wall, or holding on to the chair, slowly bend your knees a short distance; your back will slide down the wall. Keep your hips higher than your knees
- ✓ Pause for a moment before slowly straightening your knees again

Progressing this exercise:

- ✓ Increase the distance you bend your knees (remember to keep your hips higher than your knees)
- ✓ Increase the time you pause to a count of 3 before straightening your knees

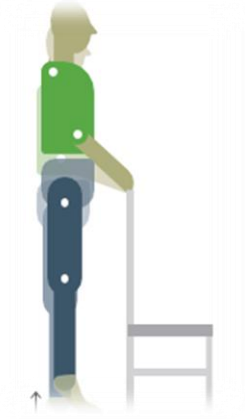


Heel Raises

- ✓ Rest your hands on a stable surface to support your balance, but do not lean on them
- ✓ Slowly rise up on to your toes, and slowly lower back down again

Progressing this exercise:

- ✓ Stand on your toes for a count of 3
- ✓ Stand on one leg at a time



Cool Down Exercises

Cool down exercises allow your body to return to normal before stopping exercise. Your cool down should last about 5 minutes, and your breathing should be back to normal by the end. Try working through all the exercises and stretches listed below. If you cannot manage all the exercises or stretches, do the ones that you can.

Exercises

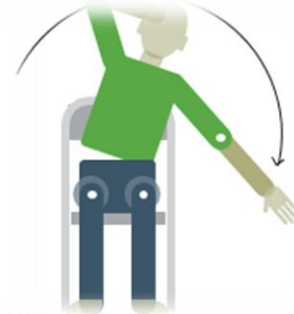
- ✓ Walking at a slower pace or gently marching on the spot, for about 2 minutes
- ✓ Repeat the warm-up exercises to move your joints; these can be done in sitting or standing

Stretches

Stretching can help to reduce any soreness you may feel in your muscles after exercise. Sometimes you can have muscle soreness for one to two days after starting a new exercise program, or longer. Each stretch should be performed gently, and you should hold each one for 15-20 seconds. You can perform each stretch 1-3 times during your cool down.

Side

Reach your right arm up to the ceiling and then lean over to the left slightly; you should feel a stretch along the right side of your body. Return to the starting position and repeat on the opposite side.



Shoulder

Put your arm out in front of you. Keeping your arm straight, bring it across your body at shoulder height, using your other hand to squeeze your arm to your chest so you feel a stretch around your shoulder. Return to the starting position, and repeat on the opposite side.



Back of Thigh (Hamstring)

Sit on the edge of a chair with your back straight and feet flat on the floor. Place your leg out straight in front of you with your heel resting on the ground.

Place your hands on your other thigh as support. Sitting as tall as you can, bend slightly forwards at your hips until you can feel a slight stretch down the back of the leg that is stretched out.

Return to the starting position, and repeat on the opposite side.

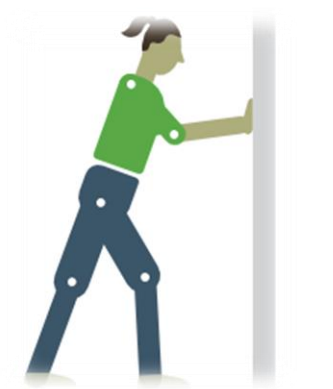


Lower Leg (Calf)

Stand with your feet apart and leaning forwards onto a wall or something sturdy for support. Keep your body upright and step one leg behind you.

With both feet facing forwards, bend your front knee, keeping your back leg straight and your heel on the floor.

You should feel a stretch in the back of your lower leg. Return to the starting position and repeat on the opposite side.



Front of Thighs (Quads)

Stand up and hold onto something stable for support. Bend one leg up behind you, and if you can reach it, use the hand on the same side to hold your ankle or the back of your leg.

Take your foot up towards your bottom until you feel a stretch along the front of your thigh.

Keep your knees close together and your back straight. Return to the starting position and repeat on the opposite side.



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Long COVID

Everyone recovers at a different rate – some people will recover within a few weeks, and others will take months. This is true regardless of age and prior health status. For anyone having ongoing symptoms months after their initial illness, they are considered to have **Long COVID**.

This is an ongoing area of research, and there is a lot we don't know yet.

Ongoing symptoms associated with Long COVID can include:

fever	heart palpitations	depression	brain fog
headaches	gastrointestinal issues (diarrhea, constipation, nausea, vomiting)	anxiety	tinnitus (ringing in ears)
weakness	cough	sleep issues	changes to vision and hearing
fatigue	skin rash	post-traumatic stress disorder	Swallowing difficulties
shortness of breath	difficulties with memory and concentration, dizziness	sore throat	
muscle and joint pain		nasal congestion	
chest pain	loss of taste and smell	persistent cough	

Below are links to webpages which have been recommended by patient groups to support recovery with Long COVID:



Search on social media COVID-19 “Long COVID” support groups
For example: **COVID Long Haulers Support Group Canada**
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/920314451799658> is Canada's largest online support group, a Canadian movement to connect COVID long haulers to support and information.



www.longcovid.org



www.rcot.co.uk/recovering-covid-19-post-viral-fatigue-and-conserving-energy



www.physiosforme.com/covid-19



www.socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/helpful-new-covid-19-resource-personalised-wellbeing-plan-template/



[https://www.csp.org.uk/system/files/documents/2020-06/001751_COVID-19-the road to recovery activity planner v3.pdf](https://www.csp.org.uk/system/files/documents/2020-06/001751_COVID-19-the_road_to_recovery_activity_planner_v3.pdf)



<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/>



<https://www.phosp.org/>

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Returning to Work, School or Leisure

Everyone will return to work, school, or leisure activities at a different rate and pace. It may depend on how you are feeling and if you have any ongoing symptoms. Some people may be able to return to work or school as soon as they are no longer isolating.

Other people may be having ongoing symptoms like [fatigue](#), [shortness of breath](#), and [difficulties with memory](#), which will make it harder to return to their day-to-day activities.

Some people might experience **bullying or stigma** when they return to work or school. If you are experiencing this, seek help. You have done nothing wrong, and need a supportive work environment in which to continue your recovery.

- Bullying: when someone hurts or scares another person on purpose and the person being bullied has a hard time defending themselves (<https://www.bullyingcanada.ca/get-help/>).
- Stigma: A set of negative and often unfair beliefs that a society or group of people have about something (<https://www.smartkidswithld.org/getting-help/emotions-behaviors/the-stigmatized-child/>).



My Health Alberta - > [Stigma and COVID-19:](#)

<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/health/pages/conditions.aspx?Hwid=acI0024>

- ✓ Work may be a big part of some people's lives. Work may make us feel like we're doing something positive and it makes us feel responsible. It gives us an income, it may let us interact with others, and it may give us structure.
- ✓ People who are able to return to work or school after illness often find it can be positive; however if you're struggling with the basics (getting dressed, having a shower, making a meal) it's may be too early to start thinking about a return to work or school.
- ✓ Talk to your family doctor, your school principle or your employer to help you start planning your return to work or school. Many places can provide a gradual return to work or school, to help you gradually build back up to your regular hours.



The Government of Canada -> Gradual return to Work

<https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/wellness-inclusion-diversity-public-service/health-wellness-public-servants/disability-management/fundamentals-return-to-work-plan.html>

Here are a few tips to help you:

Sitting at a desk:

- ✓ Adjust your chair so your feet are flat on the floor. If you can't do this, use a footrest so your feet can be flat.
- ✓ Keep the curve in your lower back. If your chair doesn't help, place a small cushion or rolled towel across the curve of your back.
- ✓ Keep reading materials at eye level. Avoid leaning over your desk.
- ✓ Avoid bending, leaning, or twisting at the waist. Keep your workstation and tools within easy reach.

Take breaks and move your body often:

- ✓ Take 10 – 15 second breaks. For example, look away from your computer monitor, stand up, or stretch your arms. Short breaks reduce eyestrain and muscle tension.
- ✓ Move around. When you are sitting, change your position often. Switch between standing and sitting, if possible.
- ✓ If you can, go for a walk. This can be as simple as walking up and down the hall. If possible, leave the building and walk a few blocks.
- ✓ Stretch your body. Get up out of your chair and stretch your arms, shoulders, back, and legs. When you are sitting, shrug and relax your shoulders. Do this at least every hour. It doesn't hurt to do it more.

Performing physical activities:

- ✓ You may want to return to your job but only with certain limits. For instance, your doctor may tell you
 - not to lift objects over 40 pounds,
 - limit the number of repeated tasks that a job may require, or
 - do less than you normally would on a shift or during your workday.
- ✓ You may need to take rest breaks if your job requires standing for long periods of time.

Examples for work arrangements to help you get back to work when you are recovering from an illness may include:

- **Hours –**
 - slow gradual return to work,
 - work a flexible schedule flextime to attend appointments,
 - balance work with your personal life, and/or
 - non-standard breaks during the workday.
 - **Duties –**
 - modified work tasks,
 - reduce non-essential tasks during the return to work, and/or
 - allow extra time to complete tasks.
 - **Modified work environment –**
 - sitting instead of standing,
 - avoiding lifting heavy or awkward objects, and/or
 - work in a different location.
- ✓ Graded returns to work should consider both the hours of work and the complexity of the work.
- If you have a very complex or heavy job, you may need more time to get back to your full duties
- ✓ Typically, a graded return to work takes place over six weeks. For example,
- attending work two days a week for the first week,
 - three days a week on the second and third week,
 - four days a week on the fourth and fifth weeks and
 - full time in week six.

If you have had a serious illness and continue to feel very tired, then this may be too fast.

There may be other ways, you and your boss or school principle can figure out how to make it easier for you to get back to work or school after an illness.

You may benefit from reviewing your day-to-day routine and making small changes. This can help you to conserve energy and manage symptoms, for example, consider:

- ✓ Your journey to work or school can impact energy levels
 - Do you have a long commute that tires you out?
- ✓ Working from home
 - Can you work from home to start? This will take away commuting, and make it easier for you to take scheduled rest breaks in comfort
- ✓ Your workspace location and environment
 - Can you work in a quieter, calmer space to start
- ✓ Rest breaks
 - Can you take more or longer rest breaks to start

- ✓ Hydration and meal planning
 - Make sure you drink lots of water and healthy fluids and eat throughout the day

Work smart

- ✓ Be aware of your surroundings. Use common sense.
 - Don't lift more than you need to, and don't carry loads farther than you have to.
 - Take short breaks before you get tired.
 - Watch for hazards to avoid falling down.

These small things can make a big difference.



Sources:

- My Health Alberta > Health Information and Tools > Back to Work?
<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/health/pages/conditions.aspx?Hwid=abk6946>
- Health Information and Tools > After Brain Injury > Life After Brain Injury > After Brain Injury Guide: Work and School

<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/HealthTopics/after-brain-injury/Pages/work-and-school.aspx>

- **COVID Patient Support:**
https://covidpatientsupport.lthtr.nhs.uk/#/lessons/PKRbjTFOOnA_NVXL7uzZ_n0RLK53svzTN
- **Your COVID Recovery:** <https://www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk/your-road-to-recovery/returning-to-work/>

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When to Contact a Healthcare Provider

Recovery from COVID-19 can be different for everyone. It is important to contact a health professional, such as your family doctor, a rehabilitation or recovery professional (nurse, physiotherapist, occupational therapist, dietitian, speech language pathologist or social worker) or medical specialist, if:

- ✓ There is a change in how short of breath you are at rest
 - And it does **not** get better by using the breathing control techniques described in the "[Managing Shortness of Breath](#)" section of this resource.
- ✓ You become very short of breath with easy activities
 - And this does not improve with any of the positions for easing shortness of breath described in the "[Managing Shortness of Breath](#)" section of this resource.
- ✓ Your attention, memory, thinking, or tiredness are not improving,
 - And this makes it very difficult for you to do your daily activities, or
 - This is stopping you from going back to work or other roles.
- ✓ Your mood worsens, particularly if it lasts for several weeks.



Primary Care Provider
Health Link 811
Rehabilitation Advice Line 1-833-379-0563



If you do not have a primary care physician you can search:
<https://albertafindadoctor.ca/>



Or call Health Link 811 and request to be connected to one.

Other Helpful Resources:



Alberta Quits helpline (8am – 8pm) 1-866-710-7848



City Services – Edmonton/Calgary 311



Community and Social Services Help Line (open 24hours) 211



Family Violence Info Line (open 24 Hours) 403-310-1818



Income Support contact Centre (open 24 hours) 1-866-644-5135



AHS Mental Health Resources
<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page17311.aspx#phys>



AHS Help in Tough Times

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/amh/Page16759.aspx>



Alberta Health Services Indigenous health:

www.ahs.ca/covidih Resources in Indigenous languages:
www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1583781906998/1583781926813



General information

Alberta Health Services COVID-19 information: www.ahs.ca/covid



Alberta Health Services COVID-19 isolation information:

www.ahs.ca/isolation



Government of Alberta COVID-19 information:

www.alberta.ca/coronavirus-info-for-albertans



Government of Canada COVID-19 information:

www.canada.ca/COVID-19

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To provide feedback on this resource, please email:
RehabilitationAdviceLine@ahs.ca

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