



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive



# Recovery Post Covid-19

## Staff Handbook



# #HOLDFIRM

*Together We Are Better*

*St. Marys Hospital Phoenix Park*



Health &  
Social Care  
Professions



## **Introduction**

Covid-19 is a disease that affects your lungs and airways. It is caused by a virus called coronavirus, which also causes SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome). Covid-19 is transmitted via airborne droplets through coughing or sneezing. It can also be spread indirectly via surfaces touched by an infected individual, as the virus can live on surfaces for up to 72 hours. Therefore it is important that surfaces in your home are regularly cleaned with household disinfectants. Hand hygiene and cough etiquette are key in reducing the spread of Covid-19. This booklet has been designed by your Health and Social Care Professional colleagues in St Mary's Hospital to support you in your recovery from Covid-19.



### **Disclaimer:**

This is general information. If it differs from advice given to you by your Doctor or health professional, follow their advice as it is specific to your needs.

# **Breathlessness**

Breathlessness is a common symptom of Covid-19, people often report being short of breath with simple activities such as getting dressed, walking or going up stairs.

Breathlessness can cause a sense of anxiety which may worsen the breathlessness.

After a period of illness it is normal to become deconditioned with your muscles becoming weaker, this will also contribute to feeling breathless. It is essential to help your muscles become strong again as well as increasing your aerobic activity, i.e. walking. Please see section on “Loss of Muscle Strength” for advice on strengthening.

## **Techniques to help to manage breathlessness**

### **Positioning**

To help control breathlessness you can adopt positions that help the muscles used for breathing to become more effective. These are known as “positions of ease”. Some of these are shown below. With all positions, try to relax the hands, wrists, shoulders, neck and jaw as much as possible.



### **Breathing techniques**

**Relaxed breathing or “belly breathing”** can help reduce the feeling of breathlessness. To do this make sure you are in a comfortable, supported upright seated position with your shoulders and upper chest relaxed. Place your hands on your belly, as you breathe in, you should feel your hand rise and then fall as you breathe out. Your breathing should be slow and steady.

If you notice you have a tendency to breathe quickly, taking short breaths, with the rise and fall coming mainly from the upper chest, focusing on “belly breathing” may help ease your breathlessness.

**Deep Breathing** is simply taking a slow deep breath in through your nose, hold for 1-3 seconds and relaxed breath out through your mouth.

Using a cycle of relaxed breathing for ten seconds and deep breathing for 3-5 breaths can help improve ventilation and also clear any mucus you may have.

## Pursed Lip Breathing

This may help if you are really breathless. It works by slowing down the air leaving your lungs to make it easier to take the next breath. Find a comfortable position with shoulders relaxed. Breathe in through your nose and out in a relaxed manner through pursed lips. Continue until your breathing is under control.

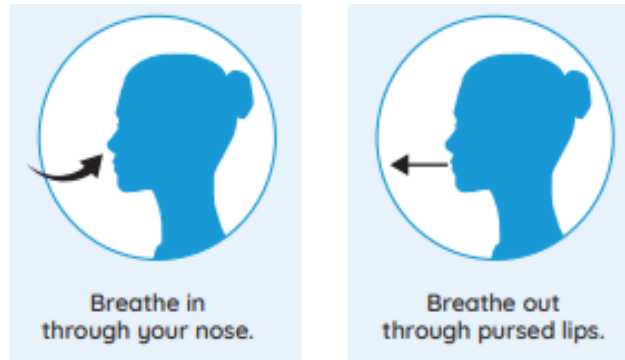


Image: ISCP, CPRC COVID Breathlessness Advice Leaflet

Some people report that a cool draft of air, on your face, from a fan can help ease the feeling of breathlessness.

## Stretching and Thoracic Mobilisation

Below are some movements and positions that can help to stretch out your chest and thorax to allow you to take a deeper breath.



### Side Flexion

Gently reach your arm over head, as much as you are able.

Take a deep breath in as you reach and breathe slowly out as you return to upright sitting



### Rotation

Lying on your back

Gently roll your knees to one side, hold for 15 seconds, return to middle and repeat to opposite side

# Exercise and Breathlessness

## Walking as Exercise

Walking is a very good form of exercise but it is important to be used in conjunction with strengthening exercises, see the section on “Loss of Muscle Strength” for details.

It is important to increase your walking gradually starting with shorter walks, for example 10 minutes, a few times throughout the day and building up the distance and pace slowly to 30 minutes over a number of weeks.

When walking for exercise you should only be moderately short of breath, this means you should be able to hold a conversation i.e.” talk and walk”. Aim for a score of 4-6 on the Rate of Perceived Exertion below.

## Physical Activity

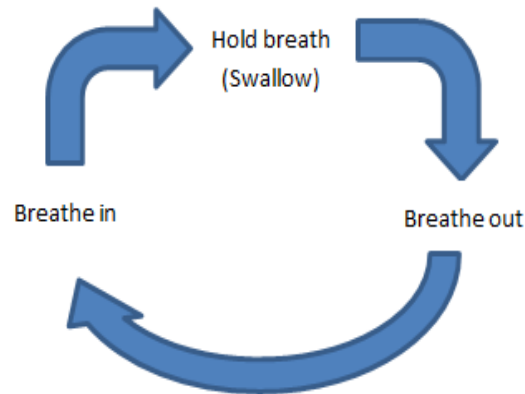
It is important to remember all activity will use up your energy reserves, so activities around the house will also require energy. This is why planning the timing and pacing of your activities and exercise is really important.

**IMPORTANT: DO NOT HOLD YOUR BREATH WHEN EXERCISING**

RPE Scale	Rate of Perceived Exertion
10	<b>Max Effort Activity</b> Feels almost impossible to keep going. Completely out of breath, unable to talk. Cannot maintain for more than a very short time.
9	<b>Very Hard Activity</b> Very difficult to maintain exercise intensity. Can barely breath and speak only a few words
7-8	<b>Vigorous Activity</b> Borderline uncomfortable. Short of breath, can speak a sentence.
4-6	<b>Moderate Activity</b> Breathing heavily, can hold short conversation. Still somewhat comfortable, but becoming noticeably more challenging.
2-3	<b>Light Activity</b> Feels like you can maintain for hours. Easy to breathe and carry a conversation
1	<b>Very Light Activity</b> Hardly any exertion, but more than sleeping, watching TV, etc

## Breathlessness at mealtimes

Breathlessness can also impact how you eat and drink. Typically, you hold your breath when you swallow to protect your airway and then exhale. However due to Covid-19, you may find it more difficult to coordinate this breath-swallow cycle.



Helpful strategies if you are having trouble swallowing:

- Avoid eating/drinking when breathless
- Take small sips/mouthfuls
- Little and often approach. Take small breaks during meals.
- Limit speaking during mealtimes
- Remain upright during meals and for at least 30 minutes after
- You may find it easier to avoid some hard, crumbly consistencies and prefer softer food options as you recover. Softening foods with a sauce/gravy can also be helpful.

Other signs to look out for which may indicate a swallowing difficulty include coughing or choking at mealtimes, a wet voice after swallowing or feeling food stuck in your throat. If you notice any of these additional symptoms, you should consult a Speech and Language Therapist.

# Fatigue

Fatigue is a common symptom of Covid-19; many people are experiencing levels of fatigue for some time after the infection has cleared.

Energy conservation and pacing is very important in managing fatigue and breathlessness.

## **The 4 P's will help manage levels of fatigue:**

- Decide what needs to be done and what can wait and delegate if needed. If there are several "must" tasks, begin with the most important.

### Prioritise

- Take time to plan what you actually want to achieve/do or need. Making lists can help with this. Plan to alternate between heavy and light tasks. Don't hesitate to ask for help. This could be the difference between having no energy vs energy to engage in things you enjoy.

### Plan

- Listen to your body- know your limits and be mindful about pushing yourself. Taking it slow and steady will help rebuild your strength. Make sure to rest before you feel tired.

### Pace

### Position

- Sit when ever possible. Sitting supports your body so you can focus on your breathing and activities while conserving your energy.





People who are recovering from Covid-19 have reported many changes which can be linked to fatigue. This list is not exhaustive:

Noted changes:	Tasks that it may impact:	Tips to help:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reduced attention and concentration</li><li>• Difficulty multi tasking</li><li>• Delayed processing things we see and hear</li><li>• Difficulty planning basic tasks</li><li>• Foggy brain</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cooking</li><li>• Conversations</li><li>• Telephone calls</li><li>• Watching TV</li><li>• Minding children</li><li>• Remembering information at work</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make lists</li><li>• Write everything down even if you think you'll remember it</li><li>• Get people to repeat information and then repeat it back to them to ensure you have it all</li><li>• Set a timer if you are cooking</li><li>• Plan tasks before you start</li><li>• Watch or read short familiar items</li></ul>

As we experience these challenges, it is important to set small goals that are achievable. For most people this is not the time to start learning new things or attempting new challenges. We can experience cognitive fatigue if we attempt this which may impact on our overall fatigue levels. It's important to set the just right challenge for yourself.

## **Diet and Fatigue**

Fatigue may impact on your ability to prepare meals; here are some tips to help maintain a healthy diet during your recovery.

- When your energy levels are good, cook and freeze extra portions
- Ask family or friends to help with shopping and cooking
- Use ready-made/ frozen meals on the days that you do not feel like cooking
- Use foods such as tinned soups, baked beans, tinned meat and fish, potato waffles, ready-made rice pudding and custard, yoghurts, biscuits, cereal bars and breakfast cereals
- Have nourishing drinks when you do not feel like eating
- Have a bedtime snack so that hunger will not wake you up
- Avoid drinks that contain caffeine and chocolate before bedtime
- Don't drink alcohol near bedtime. It may help you to fall asleep more quickly but your sleep tends to be broken

# Anxiety Management and Wellbeing

The spread of Covid-19 is a new and challenging worldwide event. Most people's lives, and their ways of working have changed in different ways, and very quickly over the last few months. As a result, each of us have experienced varying degrees of emotional upset, anxiety and fear as our working environments and the world around us has changed beyond our control.

During this time, you may have experienced, or are experiencing some of the following feelings:

- increased anxiety
- feeling stressed
- finding yourself excessively checking for symptoms, in yourself, or others
- becoming irritable more easily
- feeling insecure or unsettled
- fearing that normal aches and pains might be the virus
- having trouble sleeping
- feeling helpless or a lack of control
- having irrational thoughts

These feelings are completely normal. The above have all been reported by people recovering from Covid-19. Guided imagery is a technique which involves mentally visualizing a place in your life that represents safety, comfort or happiness. Places may include a garden, a beach or a house. You can practice some deep "belly" breathing exercise during this. Meditation may also be used as a relaxation technique.

**Doing things that you enjoy is a great way to relax. This may include:**



Worrying about the health of our service users, our colleagues, families and friends can also add to our day to day worries. If you find the ongoing media coverage on Covid-19 is too intense for you, consider limiting how much time you spend on social media, or reading newspaper articles, and talk it through with someone close or get support.

In these challenging times, our work colleagues, our friends and family members can be a good source of support.

It is very important to look after yourself, your body and mind. It does not take very much time and regular practice can dramatically help. Some good examples of mindfulness can be found on 'Every Mind Matters' on YouTube, Headspace or apps such as Calm or Lumosity Mindfulness

Emotional healing takes time and is harder to see than physical healing. Try to be kind to yourself, take time to focus on your emotional recovery as well as physical recovery.

## **Psychological Supports for Staff:**

Covid-19 has placed extraordinary demands on all healthcare staff. Healthcare staff members have worked incredibly hard in the context of unprecedented demands to care for our patients, residents, ourselves, our families and one another. Attending to one's psychological well-being at this time is important.

**At present there are staff counsellors available on site for staff for Psychological First Aid at the following numbers:**

**01-6250459/ 01-6250444**

**Appointments are available from 10am-6pm Monday-Friday, either face to face or over the phone.**

**Additionally, the HSE Employee Assistance Programme; Staff Care, provides a national service 24 hours a day, 7 days per week and can be reached at 1800409388.**

Please see "Useful Links and Resources" section for further details of supports available.

## **Voice Care and Pain on Swallowing**

One of the reported symptoms of Covid-19 is temporary changes to your voice which can include the sound as well as discomfort. Prolonged periods of coughing can cause the vocal cords to become inflamed. It is estimated that these symptoms should have resolved within 6-8 weeks. You should go to your GP if voice problems remain after this period. Here are some tips to help you with caring for your voice:

- Drink plenty of water and supplementing this with gentle steaming will help to keep your vocal cords hydrated. Steaming is done by gently breathing in steam through your nose or mouth from a bowl of hot water or while in the shower. There should be nothing added to the water and it should not be so hot that it causes coughing or discomfort.
- Avoid behaviours such as forced whispering, throat clearing or straining your voice over background noise as this may worsen or prolong symptoms. Aim to use your normal voice when speaking.
- Avoid smoking, vaping, caffeinated drinks, menthol lozenges or mouthwashes with alcohol as these items will irritate your vocal cords.
- If you experience vocal fatigue, take rest breaks. Opt for email or text based chat to communicate with others rather than video or phone calling to take a break.
- The psychological impact of being unwell can be significant. It is important to note that our voices and our emotional states are closely linked. See the section in this booklet on minding your wellbeing as improvements in this area may also benefit your vocal recovery.

Pain on swallowing can be caused by typical viral infections so it makes sense that this is also an issue for people recovering from Covid-19. Here are some tips that may help if you are experiencing this:

- Pain in the throat can be caused by dryness. Try some of the tips in the 'Caring for your Voice' section on how to keep your vocal tract well hydrated.
- Inflammation from coughing could also be causing discomfort. Try cooling and soothing drinks/foods such as lemon and honey tea, ice pops, ice cream, yoghurt etc.
- You may find softer foods easier to swallow, such as rice pudding, porridge or any soft cereal, scrambled egg/omelette/poached egg, soft cheese, petit filous, hummous, couscous, soft pasta or mashed potatoes for example.
- Try taking nutritious drinks such as milk or milk-based drinks (e.g. yoghurt drinks, homemade milshakes or smoothies).
- If you are experiencing other difficulties when swallowing, please consult a Speech and Language Therapist.

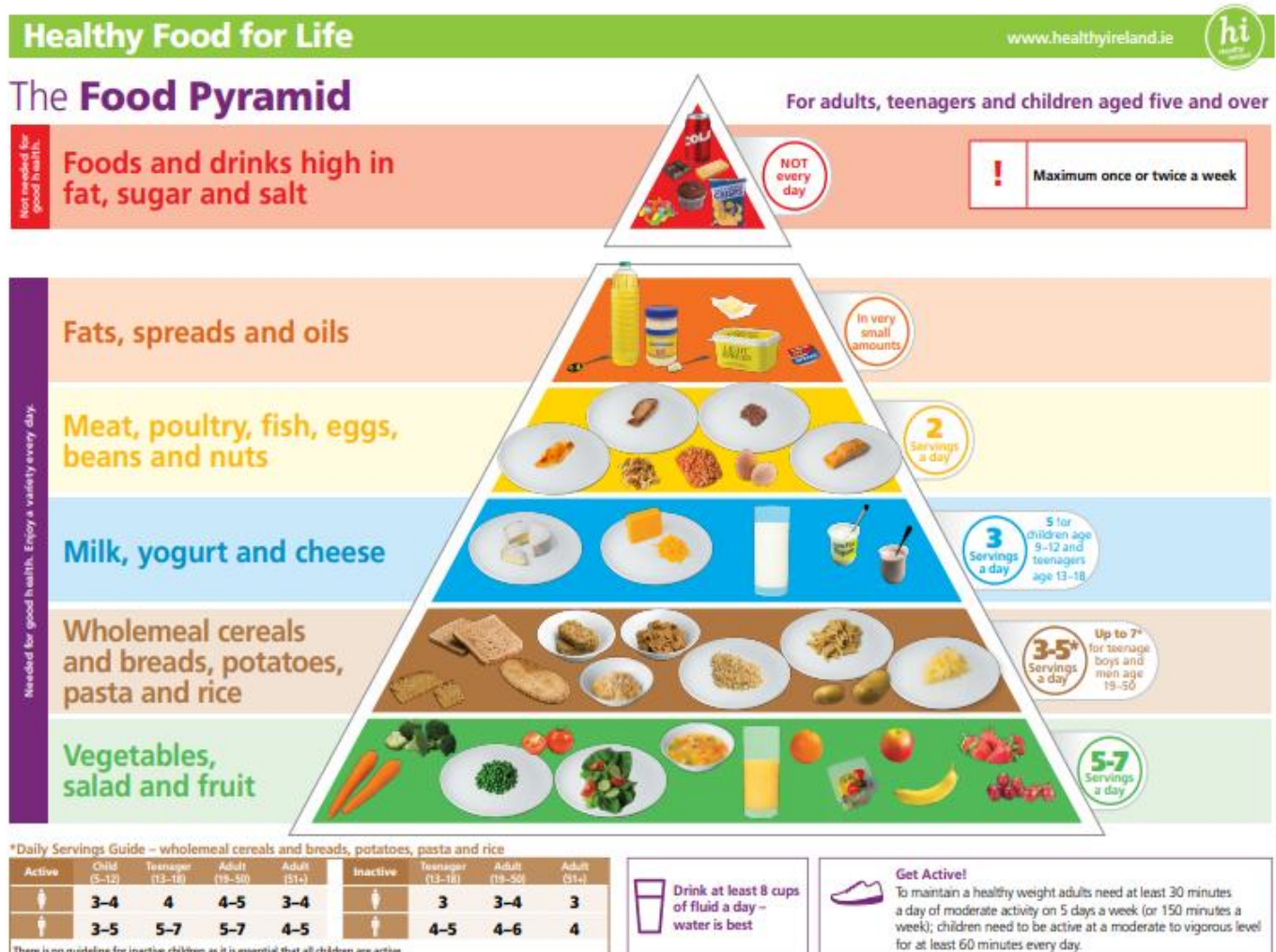
# Nutrition

Nutrition is a vital part of the recovery process in Covid-19. You may experience weight loss and muscle wasting as a result of some of the effects of Covid-19, which can include loss of appetite, fatigue, loss of/ or altered sense of taste and smell and stomach upset.

## Healthy Balanced Diet

A healthy balanced diet provides you with vitamins and minerals which are important to support your immune system during illness. The food pyramid below depicts the principles of a healthy balanced diet.

- Eat plenty of fruit, salad and vegetables. Aim for 5-7 servings a day.
- Enjoy whole grains at each meal (include wholegrain or wholemeal cereals, breads, potatoes, pasta and rice)
- Include three portions of low-fat dairy (milk, yoghurt or cheese)
- Include 2 servings a day of protein foods (meat, poultry, fish, eggs, beans or nuts)
- Opt for very small amounts of fats, spreads and oils
- Limit alcohol and foods high in fat, sugar and salt
- Keep active and maintain a healthy weight



## Reduced Appetite

During Covid-19 illness and recovery you may find 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. Higher energy and protein foods can help you to get the most out of the foods you eat and may help you to regain some of the weight or strength you have lost. Sometimes drinks may be easier to tolerate than food, try to choose nourishing drinks.

### Foods to focus on if you have lost your appetite

<b>High Energy Foods</b>	Bread, breakfast cereals, potatoes, rice, pasta, and fats such as butter, oils, nut butters, nuts, cream, mayonnaise and sauces
<b>High Protein Foods</b>	<b>Distribute intake throughout the day</b> Animal sources such as meat, chicken, fish, eggs, milk, cheese, yoghurts and plant sources such as nuts, peas, beans and lentils
<b>Nourishing Drinks</b>	Milk and milk-based drinks such as hot chocolate, smoothies and yoghurt drinks.

### Tips for managing gastrointestinal symptoms

Some people with Covid-19 have gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea. These symptoms usually lead to a loss of appetite.

- Aim to drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration.
- Eat small, light meals; you may find you tolerate easily digested foods better e.g. ice cream, milk puddings.
- If you are sensitive to the smell of certain foods, try more bland foods including breakfast cereal, bread or toast, soup and crackers, yoghurt, milk puddings, scones or sandwiches.
- Avoid fatty, greasy or fried foods.
- Avoid spicy or very sugary foods.
- Foods containing ginger may help nausea e.g. ginger ale or tea, ginger nut biscuits, or fresh ginger in hot water
- Peppermint tea can also help relieve nausea

## Make the most of your meals

- Eat the foods that you enjoy at times of the day when you feel like eating most.
- Eat your biggest meal when your appetite is best.
- Eat small frequent meals and include snacks in between meals. Aim to eat every 2-3 hours.
- Do not skip meals – try a few mouthfuls even if you are not hungry.
- Include fluids between meals, as they may fill you up while eating. Opt for nourishing drinks.
- Avoid 'low fat' or 'diet' products.
- Fortify foods with ingredients such as cream, cheese, butter and olive oil. For example, add cream to soups and curries and add cheese or butter to scrambled eggs, vegetables or potatoes.
- Fortify your usual milk by whisking 2-4 tablespoons of skimmed milk powder into 1 pint of milk.
- Add sugar, honey, syrup and jams to porridge, milky puddings, or add to bread, toast or tea cakes.
- Light exercise or some fresh air may help your appetite.



From November to March sunlight in Ireland cannot stimulate human skin to make any vitamin D. A supplement providing 5µg -10µg Vitamin D is the best choice for adults, who want to supplement their diet during these months.

**Note: This is general information. If you are on a special diet for example for diabetes, chronic kidney disease, coeliac disease or any other special diet, please link in with your Dietitian or GP.**



## **Changes to Taste and Smell (Anosmia)**

- Changes in taste and smell reported with Covid-19 tend to be temporary and 80% of people will recover in 8 weeks. Taste tends to recover quicker than smell. The remaining 10% of people are likely to take months rather than weeks to recover as the olfactory nerves regenerate. Small changes that you notice in smell are positive signs of recovery.
- Smell training is recommended early to support the recovery process.
- If you notice that you still have no smell at all at 8 weeks, it is advisable to go to your GP for any additional advice.
- Visit the [abscent.org](https://abscent.org) webpage for information on loss of smell (anosmia), smell training and supports.

### **Tips for managing changes to taste and smell**

- Try flavouring food with herbs, spices or food seasonings.
- Experiment with lemon juice, onion, garlic, mint, basil, pepper, chilli, chutneys and vinegar
- Try marinating meat, chicken or fish.
- Hold off eating foods that no longer appeal to you. Try them again some days later as your taste may continue to change.
- It is important to be extra vigilant when cooking as you may not smell food if it is burning during the cooking process.

# Loss of Muscle Strength

During any period of illness we will lose muscle strength, this is a common reported experience with people who are recovering from Covid-19. Some of the weight loss experienced will be due to the loss of muscle bulk/mass. It is really important to strengthen your muscles to help with fatigue, breathlessness and exercise tolerance. Strengthening your large muscle groups in both arms and legs is an essential part of your recovery. Below is a selection of basic strengthening exercises that you can do at home. We have included some seated, lying and standing exercises. Aim to complete them daily starting with 8-10 repetitions and increasing to 30 repetitions. You do not need to do them all in one go; you can spread them over the course of the day.



## **Bridging:**

Lying on your back, bend your knees and lift your bottom off the bed. Hold for a count of 3 and return to starting position



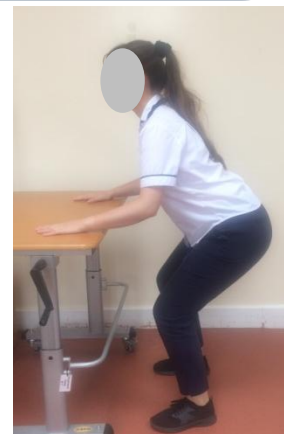
## **Knee Extension:**

Lift lower leg pulling toes toward head, hold for a count of 3 seconds and return to starting position



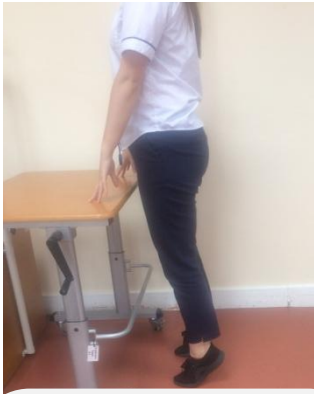
## **Hip Abduction:**

Lying on your side lift your top leg up, hold for a count of 3 and return to starting position



## **Squat**

Holding a surface if needed. Squat down as able and return to stand



### Heel Raises

Holding a surface.  
Push up on your  
toes and return to  
standing



### Sit to stand

With or without  
using your hands  
stand up and sit  
down in a  
controlled manner



### Bicep Curls

With any available  
weight

Alternatively bend  
and straighten your  
elbows, in a slow  
controlled manner



### Wall Push Ups

Place hands as shown

Drop your nose  
toward the wall and  
then push the wall  
away returning to  
starting position.

Keeping your back  
straight throughout



### Shoulder Press:

With any available  
weight (bottle/can)

Push hand up toward  
the ceiling- alternating  
arms

**IMPORTANT: DO NOT HOLD YOUR BREATH WHEN EXERCISING**

None of these exercises should be painful or cause discomfort and if they are please discontinue and contact the physiotherapy department.

# **Sleep**

Sleep can be disturbed at any given time for many different reasons however our sleep may be more affected when we are worried, stressed, and anxious or have had changes to your daily routine or health.

Sleep disruption has been a common reported symptom with Covid-19.

Ensuring a good sleep routine is very important. Below are some tips that may help with a good sleep routine:

- Avoid alcohol and nicotine before going to sleep and during the night
- Avoid bright lights, including television and phones, before going to sleep because they are stimulating
- Don't exercise or eat a heavy meal shortly before going to sleep
- Avoid napping during the day because it will make you less tired at night
- Make your bedroom as comfortable as possible by keeping it cool, reducing noise and light
- Do not use your bed for working, reading, or watching television. This way, your body will associate your bed with sleep, not with activity.
- If you have trouble falling asleep or if you wake up during the night and can't fall back to sleep, get out of bed and do something until you feel tired enough to go back to sleep. Don't lie in bed thinking about other things; this will just make you feel more aggravated and make it harder to get back to sleep.
- Go to bed at the same time every night and wake up at the same time every morning.
- Use some kind of relaxation method before going to sleep in order to calm your body and mind eg taking a bath, meditating and writing down your thoughts

## Resources and Useful Links:

<https://www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/mental-health/covid-19/minding-your-mental-health-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak.html>

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/minding-your-long-term-health-condition-during-condition-during-coronavirus-covid19.pdf>

<https://stresscontrol.org>

<https://hse.silvercloudhealth.com/signup/> (Use code HSE2020)

<https://www.stpatricks.ie/media-centre/blogs-articles/2020/march/coronavirus-anxiety>

<https://mindfulness.ie/>

<http://www.beaumont.ie/marc> (Mindfulness and Relaxation Centre)

<https://abscent.org> (For information on anosmia [loss of smell])

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/our-priority-programmes/heal/healthy-eating-guidelines/>

# How to handrub?

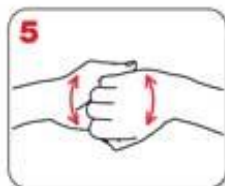
WITH ALCOHOL-BASED FORMULATION



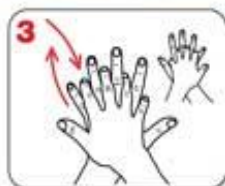
Apply a palmful of the product in a cupped hand and cover all surfaces.



Rub hands palm to palm



backs of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked



right palm over left dorsum with interlaced fingers and vice versa



rotational rubbing of left thumb clasped in right palm and vice versa



palm to palm with fingers interlaced



rotational rubbing, backwards and forwards with clasped fingers of right hand in left palm and vice versa



rinse hands with water



dry thoroughly with a single use towel



use towel to turn off faucet



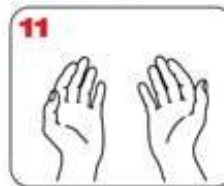
20-30 sec



...once dry, your hands are safe.



40-60 sec



...and your hands are safe.



WHO acknowledges the Hôpitaux Universitaires de Genève (HUG), in particular the members of the Infection Control Programme, for their active participation in developing this material.



October 2008, version 1.

**This booklet has been compiled by your HSCP colleagues, if you have any further queries please contact the individual department:**

**St. Mary's Campus HSCP Departments:**

Physiotherapy Dept: 01-7959348

Occupational Therapy Dept: 01-7959381

Medical Social Work Dept: 01-7959404

Speech and Language Therapy Dept: 01-7959411

Dietetic Dept: 01-7959373



**#HOLDFIRM**

