

# After COVID-19

## Information and resources to help you recover

Recovering from COVID-19 can be difficult and is different for everyone, but you are not alone. There are resources and supports to help you or a loved one manage long-term health effects after COVID-19.

This collection of resources can help you understand the effects of COVID-19 and help you to cope with health challenges you may have. It can also help you make a plan with your healthcare provider to improve your health and manage your symptoms. This is important as you recover, so you can get back to the things you need and want to do.

### What is long COVID?

Long COVID is when you still have symptoms more than 12 weeks after you are first diagnosed with COVID-19.

Recovering from COVID-19 is different for everyone, no matter your age or your health. Some people feel better in a few days or weeks. For others, it may take months or longer.

Research about long COVID is still happening, and we are learning more about it all the time. The information here reflects what we know now, and it is reviewed regularly.

### Who is this resource for?

This resource is for people recovering from COVID-19 who are having ongoing health concerns. It's also for anyone who is caring for a person recovering from COVID-19.

The resources here are general. Depending on your symptoms, your limits, and how you are recovering, they may or may not apply to you. Remember to pace yourself as you recover from COVID-19.

### Who should I call for help?

Recovering from COVID-19 is different for everyone. Talk to your healthcare provider about your recovery plan and what is best for you if you:

- are worried about your recovery
- feel short of breath and it's not getting better, no matter what you try
- feel very short of breath doing things that are normally easy for you
- find that your attention, memory, thinking, or energy levels are not getting better
- have symptoms that make it very hard or that stop you from doing your regular daily activities (like caring for yourself or going back to work or school)
- feel depressed, anxious, or stressed and this feeling isn't getting better



If it's a medical emergency, **call 911 right away**. This includes:

- serious trouble breathing or struggling for each breath
- very bad chest pain
- having a hard time waking up
- feeling very confused
- passing out or fainting

You can also call the following support lines for help:

- **Rehabilitation Advice Line:** If you have questions about your symptoms, nutrition, or recovery plan, and it is not an emergency, call 1-833-379-0563.
- **Mental Health Helpline:** If you have questions or concerns about your mental health, call 1-877-303-2642.
- **Indigenous Health Helpline:** If you are an Indigenous person who has a question about Alberta Health Services, has a concern, or needs help using the healthcare system, call 1-844-944-4744.

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## Symptoms

If you had COVID-19, the symptoms can linger or new symptoms can develop later on. Read about how you can manage your symptoms as you recover from COVID-19.

### Breathing or respiratory

- [Cough that won't go away](#)
- [Shortness of breath](#) (feeling like you can't breathe deeply enough)

### Headache, dizziness, and light headedness

- [Dizziness: Lightheadedness and vertigo](#)
- [Headache](#)

### Heart

- [Heart palpitations](#) (fast or irregular heartbeat)

### Mental health and brain fog

- [Confusion or trouble concentrating](#)
- [Brain fog, trouble with memory and concentration](#)
- [Depression, anxiety, stress](#)

### Nutrition, eating, drinking, swallowing

- [Diarrhea](#)
- [Constipation](#)
- [Nausea and vomiting](#)
- [Problems with swallowing](#) (dysphagia)

### Pain and fever

- [Muscle and joint pain](#)
- [Sore throat](#)
- [Fever](#)



## Sleep

- [Fatigue](#) (feeling very weak or tired)
- [Sleep problems](#)

## Vision, hearing, taste, smell

- [Changes to your vision](#)
- [Ringing in your ears](#) (tinnitus)
- [Changes to your hearing](#)
- [Loss of taste](#) (ageusia)
- [Loss of smell](#) (anosmia)

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## After COVID-19

### Self-care

If you had COVID-19, you may have trouble getting out of bed, feel tired, and not have the same energy you did before. It's important to pace yourself as you recover. Read more about how you can get back into a routine as you recover from COVID-19.

#### Read more about:

[Getting back into a routine](#)

[Managing your energy](#)

[Eating well](#)

[Sleeping well](#)



## Self-care: Getting back into a routine

After COVID-19, you may not have the same energy you did before. Everything you do takes energy, and everyday tasks can take more effort than before.

When you're ready, try getting out of bed, getting dressed, and getting back into a basic routine. This will help you recover. It will also stop deconditioning. Deconditioning is a term for when you lose strength and fitness after not moving for a while, like when you're sick in bed. It is important to try to start doing things as soon as it is safe; the longer you are in bed for all or most of the day, the more strength and fitness you lose, and the longer it will take to get it back.

Basic routines include:

- washing your face
- brushing your teeth
- getting dressed
- going to the kitchen for meals
- putting on pajamas at bedtime

Doing these everyday tasks is good for your muscles, energy, heart, lungs, and mood. Go at your own pace. It's OK if getting out of bed and getting dressed is all you have energy to do that day.

## Self-care: Managing your energy

Managing, saving, or conserving your energy all mean finding ways of doing daily tasks with as little effort as possible. This is important as you recover, because you may feel more tired than usual. Planning your activities, pacing yourself, and deciding what's important to you are all ways to help manage your energy.

### What are some ways to manage my energy?

The following links give ideas for being careful with your energy as you recover from COVID-19.

- [Conserving energy when you have COPD or other chronic conditions](#) (including COVID-19)
- [Pacing and energy conservation](#) (Note that this information can apply to your COVID-19 recovery, not just to concussions.)

### What tools can help me manage my energy?

There are many pieces of equipment or tools (called assistive devices or adaptive equipment) that can help you manage your energy. These include:

- tools for grooming and dressing
- tools for daily chores
- tools for getting around
- adaptive equipment like a [4-wheeled walker](#), bath seat, or raised toilet seat with arms

[Learn more about assistive devices](#) that may help you save your energy during recovery.

Many communities have programs that let you borrow equipment for a short time. Ask your healthcare provider about how to borrow equipment short term, if you think you need it. You can call the [AHS Rehabilitation Advice Line](#) if you need help with finding or borrowing equipment. See the [resources](#) section for more.

## Self-care: Eating well

Food gives your body energy. It's important to keep eating and drinking when you're sick and as you recover from COVID-19.

### What nutrition do I need to recover?

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

- protein foods (meat, poultry, fish, eggs, dairy, beans, and lentils) to help maintain and rebuild muscles
- fruits, vegetables, and whole grains for vitamins, minerals, and fiber to help your body recover from illness
- healthy fats (nuts and seeds, olive oil, fatty fish like salmon, and avocado) to help give you the energy and nutrition your body needs to recover
- fluids (water, coffee or tea, milk or plant-based beverages, sports drinks, and nutrition supplement drinks), which are especially important if you've been sick with a fever, throwing up, or had diarrhea

### How can I eat and drink when my energy is low?

Here are some tips to help you eat and drink when you're tired or have low energy:

- 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 to 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 so you don't get full too quickly.
- Sip small amounts of fluids if you need to drink while you eat.
- Snack every 2 to 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.
- If you're choking or having trouble swallowing, see the section on [eating, drinking, and swallowing](#) for more tips.

## Where can I learn more and find resources to help me eat well?

As you recover, see the following links to learn more about eating well, nutrition, and planning and shopping for healthy meals.

- [COVID-19: Nutrition for recovery — Alberta Health Services Nutrition Services](#)
- [Choose and prepare healthy food — Alberta Health Services Nutrition Services](#)
- [Nutrition and physical activity](#)
- [Meal planning \(menu planner and grocery list\)](#)
- [Healthy grocery list example](#)

If COVID-19 has made it harder for you to get food (for example, you can't leave your home or you've lost income), go to the [resources](#) section for places to get help.

## Self-care: Sleeping well

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

The number of hours you sleep isn't as important as how you feel when you wake up. If you don't feel refreshed, you probably need more sleep.

The following links give you information about sleep problems you may have and advice to help you sleep well:

- [Sleep and your health](#)
- [Insomnia: Improving your sleep](#)
- [Sleep problems, age 12 and older](#)
- [Sleep journal \(activity\)](#)
- [30 days to a well-rested you \(activity\)](#)

If you still have trouble with sleep, talk to your healthcare provider, pharmacist, or call **Health Link** at **811**.

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### Brain health and mental health

If you had COVID-19, you may have trouble concentrating and trouble with your memory. You may also feel depressed, anxious, or other mental health concerns. Read further about how you can manage brain health and mental health as you recover from COVID-19.

#### Read more about:

- Brain fog, trouble with memory and concentration
- Depression, anxiety, stress



## Brain health and mental health: Brain fog, trouble with memory and concentration

It's common for people who've had COVID-19 to have trouble with:

- thinking
- memory
- focus or attention

If you're having these concerns, it's important that you and your family talk about it. Changes to thinking, memory, and attention can affect your relationships, your everyday tasks, and your return to work or school. These challenges may go away in weeks or last for months. If the changes with your memory or thinking don't get better, contact your healthcare provider or talk to a [psychologist](#) or [occupational therapist](#).

### What can I try for thinking, attention, and memory concerns?

Here are some things you can try if you're having trouble thinking clearly, paying attention, and remembering. You can also see the sections about [managing your energy](#) and [going back to work or school](#) for more ideas that might help

### Exercise your body to help your brain recover

You may find it hard to exercise if you feel weak, are short of breath, or get tired easily. Slowly, try to add gentle exercises into your daily routine. See some suggestions in the [exercise section](#) to help you get started.

### Exercise your brain

Try to do things you enjoy that get your brain working. Start with tasks that are a challenge but that you can still do. When you feel ready, slowly work up to harder challenges. You might try:

- new hobbies or activities
- puzzles
- word and number games
- memory games
- reading

### Make lists, notes, and alerts

Try setting an alarm on your phone to remind you of what you need to do. Make daily lists or leave yourself notes where you will see them as reminders.

### **Break down tasks into small steps**

You can break larger tasks up into smaller ones. This makes the tasks feel easier to do.

For example, in the morning you may want to:

1. Get out of bed, brush your teeth, and brush your hair.
2. Take a break.
3. Get dressed.
4. Take a break.
5. Prepare your breakfast and eat.
6. Take a break.

Get more tips for how to manage [memory concerns and daily tasks](#).

## Brain health and mental health: Depression, anxiety, stress

Having COVID-19 can be hard on your mental health. Feeling stress, anxiety (worry, fear), or depression (feeling very sad, hopeless) is common when you're unwell and as you recover. Managing these feelings is an important part of your recovery.

If you already have a mental health care provider, it's a good idea to talk to them as you recover. Many providers are offering phone or online support. If you don't have mental health support and your symptoms are not getting better, contact your healthcare provider (such as your family doctor) or call the Alberta Health Services [Mental Health Helpline](#) for help.

[Connecting with others](#) is another way to improve your mental health. If you can't connect in person, stay in contact with friends or family online or on the phone. And remember that it's OK to ask for help. Let family and friends know that they can help by reaching out to you during your recovery, even if you don't always respond right away.

For more information about stress, anxiety, and depression, and ways you can help yourself feel better, go to the links below. Also see the [resources](#) section for more places to get help.

### Depression

- [Depression](#)
- [Depression, anxiety, and physical health problems](#)
- [Depression: Stop negative thoughts](#)

### Anxiety

- [Anxiety](#)
- [Anxiety: Stop negative thoughts](#)

### Stress

- [Stress management](#)
- [Ways to reduce stress](#)

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### Returning to work or school

After COVID-19, it's important to slowly return to your regular activities. Everyone returns to work, school, or other regular activities at a different rate or pace.

#### When is the right time to go back?

Some people feel well enough to go back to work or school as soon as they're done isolating. Other people may have symptoms like feeling very tired, shortness of breath, and trouble with memory for many months. These symptoms can make it harder to go back to doing regular activities. (See the sections on [symptoms](#) and [brain health](#) to learn more.) If you're still having symptoms, it might be too early to go back to your activities. Talk to your healthcare provider about what's best for you.

#### How can I make going back to work or school easier?

Don't try to do everything you used to do until you feel ready. As you recover, it may be best to go back to your regular work or school routine gradually. This could mean:

- talking to your employer about a gradual return to work, changing your work hours, or working from home
- taking on a role that is easier for you to manage as you recover
- making sure to take lots of breaks
- making a plan with your principal or teachers for how to learn at your own pace
- getting support for childcare

The following links have more information, as well as tips and advice, for returning to work and school after COVID-19.

- [Work and school](#) (Note that the information on this page can also apply to people returning to work and school after an illness, as well as a brain injury.)
- [Returning to school and sports](#) (Note that the information on this page can also apply to children returning to school and sports after an illness, as well as a head injury.)
- [Back to work?](#) (Note that these tips are also useful after an illness, as well as after a back injury.)
- [The fundamentals: Return-to-work plan](#) (This Government of Canada resource gives advice for making a plan to go back to work as you recover.)

#### What if I face bullying or stigma after COVID-19?

Some people might experience bullying or feel stigma going back to work or school after COVID-19. This is when others treat you badly or blame you for getting sick. If this happens



to you, get help. You did nothing wrong, and your workplace or school needs to support you in your recovery.

Learn more about [stigma and COVID-19](#).

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### Physical activity and exercise

This advice about [physical activity and exercise](#) is **general**. It may or may not apply to you depending on your symptoms, limits, and how you're recovering. For example, exercise can help recovery for some people, but it can make symptoms worse for others.

Read more about:

[Physical activity after COVID-19](#)

[Exercise after COVID-19](#)

[Exercise guidance and support](#)



## Physical activity after COVID-19

Physical activity takes energy. It can range from light to intense. You may have less energy due to COVID-19, so you may not be as active as you were before you got sick. Start with getting back into your daily routine and lighter intensity activities before you do harder, more intense tasks.

### What is physical activity?

Physical activity is any movement you do throughout your day. Here are some examples of physical activity:

- walking around your house, to your community mailbox, or up stairs
- washing and dressing yourself or other self-care activities
- doing laundry, vacuuming, and other housework or yard chores
- lifting boxes, reaching repeatedly, or other workplace tasks
- walking to the store, riding your bike to work
- gardening, playing sports, or other hobbies that get you moving
- exercising

### What should I know before starting physical activity?

It may be hard to do your regular activities when you have COVID-19 or if you still have symptoms. Add activity to your day **slowly** and **carefully**, but don't overdo it.

- **Don't** push through fatigue. It may make your symptoms worse.
- **Don't** do too much on days you feel good. It can make your symptoms worse in the following days.
- **Don't** try to do all of the things you did before getting sick. Start with easier tasks, and don't add more until your symptoms are not getting worse, not coming and going, and no new symptoms are starting.

### What are some tips for starting physical activity safely?

When you start physical activity again after COVID-19, here are the things you **can do**:

- Be patient. Getting back to your regular routine may take longer than you expect.
- Do regular movement throughout the day. You can add gentle movements while in bed. As your symptoms improve, begin to move around your house (sit up in a chair or walk to the kitchen).
- As your energy allows, get back to your basic routine. Ask for help from a health professional if you're struggling to get back to your daily routine.
- Choose the type or amount of activity based on how you feel and what's important to you.

- Keep track of how you feel. Notice what makes your symptoms better or worse. Limit activities that make your symptoms worse. Limit activities that make your symptoms worse.
- **Stop, rest, and pace** as you return to activity. Pacing means balancing activities with rest to manage your energy.

For more about managing your energy and pacing techniques, see the following links:

- [Self-care: Managing your energy](#)
- [Post-COVID-19 fatigue and routines \(video\)](#)

## Exercise after COVID-19

Exercise is a type of physical activity that is planned, structured, and has a purpose. You do it to improve your physical fitness.

Exercise includes physical activity that makes your muscles stronger, makes your body more flexible, and gives you better aerobic fitness (heart and lung health).

It's important to slowly start doing other physical activity before adding exercise.

### When can I start or return to exercise after COVID-19?

Exercise could make COVID-19 symptoms worse or cause new ones to appear.

Follow these guidelines for starting or returning to exercise.

#### First 10 days

Do not exercise in the first 10 days after a positive COVID-19 test or the start of symptoms. Be careful even if you have no symptoms at first. COVID-19 symptoms may start later than usual.

#### You have no symptoms

If you have no symptoms, wait at least 10 days after a positive COVID-19 test before starting exercise. Then start with light exercise that doesn't raise your heart rate. If you feel well, keep exercising at a [level that feels right for you](#).

#### You have symptoms

If you have symptoms, wait until they're gone before you exercise. Make sure you're back to your usual routine and can do your regular [activities of daily living](#) without making your symptoms worse.

#### You have ongoing or new symptoms

If you continue to have symptoms or new symptoms start when you become more active, be careful. Talk to your doctor before you exercise. Focus on managing your energy and symptoms.

### How do I know if it's too early to exercise?

Doing too much too soon can make your symptoms worse. If your symptoms get worse when you're active, **stop exercising and get medical advice**.

It's too early to exercise if you:

- have trouble doing basic tasks like getting dressed or showering
- have ongoing symptoms of COVID-19 (such as feeling very tired, having a fast heart rate, or feeling dizzy)
- have symptoms that aren't getting better, are coming back, or new symptoms
- have more severe long COVID symptoms and can't return to your usual activity

If it's too early for you to exercise, focus on the things that help you feel better.

## What should I do when I'm ready to exercise?

Here are some guidelines for exercising safely when you're ready:

- Be slow and careful when you start.
- Stop and rest if your symptoms get worse during exercise. If you don't recover after resting, you may need to stop exercising and wait until your symptoms are better. If you recover with rest, exercise for less time at an easier pace.
- Pace yourself so you don't make your symptoms worse, get injured, or have new symptoms.
- Keep prescription medicine—such as an inhaler for a lung condition or nitroglycerine for a heart condition—with you when you exercise. Make sure your prescriptions are current.
- Track how you feel during and in the hours and days after exercising. Tracking can help you see if exercise is making you feel worse.
- Warm up before exercising and cool down after exercising.
- Exercise at the right level for you (see below).

For more advice on exercise, watch the video [Tips for getting started with exercise after COVID-19](#).

## Am I exercising at the right level for me?

Exercise is meant to keep you fit or get you more fit. To do that, you need to exercise at the right level for you.

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

- **Too hard:** You cannot speak at all, can only say 1 word at a time, or are feeling short of breath. Slow down or stop and rest.
- **Just right:** You can speak a full sentence, pausing once or twice to catch your breath, and you're only a little short of breath. Keep going.
- **Easy:** You can speak a full sentence without stopping and are not feeling short of breath. Speed up a bit.

If your symptoms are getting worse after you exercise, stay in the easy zone.

Tracking your symptoms can also help you know if you are exercising at the right level and not making your symptoms worse.

Learn more about symptom tracking by watching the video [Exercising at the right level and monitoring symptoms after COVID-19](#).

## Exercise guidance and support

It's important to know how to exercise safely depending on your symptoms. Guidelines can give you a general idea. But they **never** replace advice from your healthcare provider. This is especially important if you:

- were in the hospital for COVID-19
- have any other health concerns or an injury
- are on [oxygen therapy](#) that your doctor prescribed
- have symptoms that get worse with activity

### Should I talk to my healthcare provider about exercise?

There are many reasons to talk to your healthcare provider about exercising after COVID-19. They can:

- screen your symptoms
- help you decide if exercise is right for you at your stage of recovery
- answer questions you have about your symptoms and exercise
- refer you to another healthcare provider or a specialist if needed

Check with your doctor **before** you start to exercise if you:

- have a heart or lung condition
- feel worse or more tired the day after exercise
- or have symptoms that stop you from doing your daily activities
- have any symptoms listed below

**Stop** exercising and contact a healthcare provider if you have any of these symptoms:

- fever that keeps coming back
- nausea (feeling sick to your stomach)
- dizzy or lightheaded
- short of breath at rest
- blurred or double vision
- headache that isn't normal for you
- tight feeling or pain in your chest
- pain that is very bad or limits your daily activity
- irregular blood pressure or heart rate
- trouble doing more your activity, or feeling worse after exercising

**Don't** start exercising again until you've talked to your healthcare provider and your symptoms have improved.

## Do I need exercise support?

Get support with exercise if any of the following apply to you:

- You keep having symptoms from COVID-19 or have long COVID.
- You have chronic health conditions (for example, arthritis, diabetes, or a stroke).
- You've never exercised before.
- You're unsure about exercise or just don't know what to do or how to progress.

## Where can I get support for exercising safely after COVID-19?

If you live in Alberta, the following services can support your recovery from COVID-19:

- [The Rehabilitation Advice Line](#) at 1-833-379-0563 is free and can help screen symptoms before you start or continue with exercise. They can help you decide if it's a good time to add exercise to your routine. They can guide you in a plan for managing your symptoms and activities.
- [The Alberta Healthy Living Program](#) may offer services where you live or virtual care options. They can help you learn to manage your chronic health conditions, including long COVID. They may offer support and guidance for exercising safely.

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