

Post Covid Fatigue Management Information Pack

A workbook to help you manage your fatigue

A large decorative graphic at the bottom of the page. It features a large, light blue circular arc that frames a white circular area. Inside this white area, the text 'Better Care Together for East Sussex' is written in a black, handwritten-style font. A green curved shape is visible on the left side, partially overlapping the blue arc.

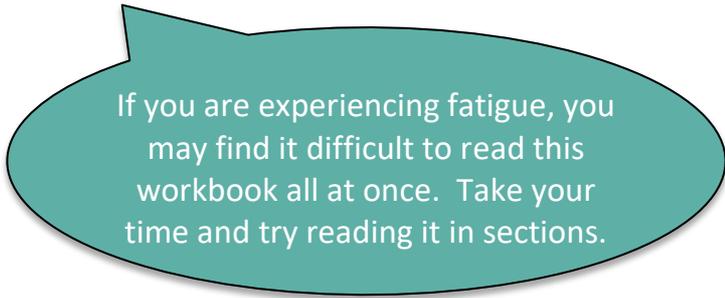
Better Care Together
for East Sussex

Table of Contents

		Page
The Course	Course guidelines	4
	How to access the course	6
What is fatigue?	Common symptoms	7
	Post Exertional Malaise (PEM)	8
	Impact on the mind, body and spirit	8
	Challenges to managing fatigue	9
	Activity diary and Traffic Lights	10
Balancing energy levels	Boom and bust	13
	Principles of fatigue management	14
	Breathing	15
	Voice fatigue	16
Rest and sleep hygiene	Therapeutic rest	17
	Relaxation methods and resources	18
	Sleep management	20
	Sleep diary	22
Additional information	Autonomic system	24
	Balanced diet	25
	Physical Activity and Exercise	26
	Building up your Baseline	27
	Managing pain	28
	Maintaining your mental wellbeing	29
	Social support	31
	Goal setting	32
	Summary	33
	Further Support	34

**Contacting the Post-COVID
Assessment and Support Service**

esht.postcovidassessment@nhs.net or
sc-tr.scftpostcovidassessment@nhs.net



If you are experiencing fatigue, you may find it difficult to read this workbook all at once. Take your time and try reading it in sections.

Course Guidelines

Welcome

We are pleased to confirm that you have been enrolled on the long COVID Fatigue Management Course. To help the course to run smoothly and for you to get the most out of the sessions please ensure you are familiar with the following information, so you know what to expect from the course.

What to Expect

This is a virtual course delivered on Microsoft Teams (MST). We will email you the meeting links in advance. The course consists of 4 weekly sessions, each lasting 60 minutes.

The course will cover the concept of fatigue, barriers, comorbidities, and other factors that can make managing fatigue more challenging. It will look at the interaction between symptoms and different body systems and what line of approach to take to ensure our minds and bodies can be receptive, perceptive, and constructive to make implementing the advice and guidance successful.

Course agenda:

Session 1 – What is fatigue?

Session 2 – Balancing energy levels

Session 3 – Rest and sleep hygiene

Session 4 – Review and reflection

There will be opportunity to discuss topics and ask questions, but we ask you to wait until you are invited to speak to ensure we have a smooth flow of participation and interaction.

Group Guidelines

To get the best out of the course, please ensure you follow these guidelines:

- Come to each session. If you are unable to attend a session, please contact the team to let us know not to expect you.
- Each week log on promptly via Microsoft Teams using the link emailed to you.
- Whilst the presenters are delivering, please keep yourself on mute, this will improve the sound quality for everyone. There will be plenty of time for you to ask questions and discuss topics.
- Have this course pack, pen and paper with you during the sessions. You may like to make your own notes, but this is not essential.

- Look after your own needs during the sessions. Keep yourself hydrated; use the bathroom as you need to. Please also feel free to stand, move and stretch as required – do whatever you need to do to be as comfortable as possible.
- Be respectful of others' ideas and input. We may not always agree, but everyone's ideas are valued, and everyone should feel comfortable to contribute.

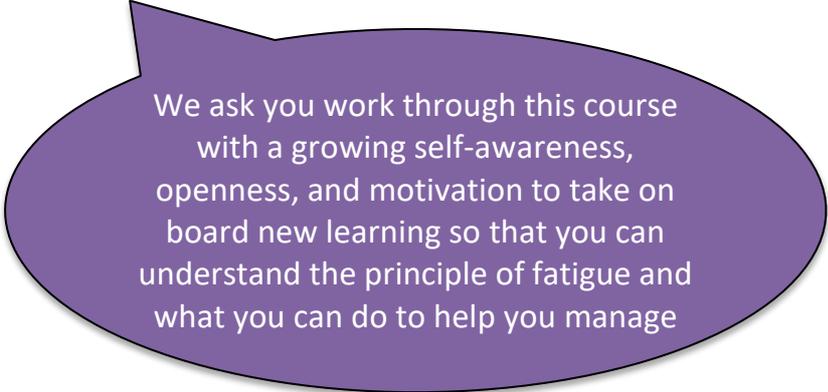
Confidentiality

It is a priority for us that all courses are secure and confidential. Only registered patients will be permitted access to the weekly sessions, so please ensure your name on Microsoft Teams appears as the name you used to book onto the course. Unfamiliar names will be held in the MS Teams lobby until we can verify your identity.

The MS Teams sessions will not be recorded by the PCASS team, and patients are not permitted to record the sessions either.

Confidentiality and privacy of all group members is paramount so non-participants are not permitted to listen to the course. Please ensure you access the sessions from a private room or alternatively please use headphones.

Please only share what you are comfortable with sharing but please be aware that any details or personal insights you gain from others in the fatigue management course **MUST** remain confidential and within the group.



We ask you work through this course with a growing self-awareness, openness, and motivation to take on board new learning so that you can understand the principle of fatigue and what you can do to help you manage

How to Access the Course

Microsoft Teams (MST)

We will be using MST to run this online course. Prior to your course you will receive an email containing an MST link to your course, you will need to use this link to access the course each week so please ensure you save this email. The link will look like this [Click here to join the meeting](#). Each week at the start of the course you will need to click on the link, and this will direct you to MS teams. You can either access MS Teams through the app or you can join on the web instead.

We ask that you log onto each session in good time so that you are ready for the start of the course. You will initially be held in the lobby for the meeting until your presenters admit you to the group.

To enable you to fully participate and engage in the course sessions you may need to access some or all of the following functions:

- Mute/unmute – you can do this by clicking on the ‘microphone’ icon.
- Raise your hand – you can do this by clicking on the ‘hand’ icon, this will make the raised hand appear in your video box, you will need to click again to lower your hand.
- How to use the chat function – click on ‘show conversation’ icon, this will open up a chat panel on your screen and enable you to type a message that can be seen by the group
- How to change your background effects – click on ‘more actions’ icon (3 dots), select apply background effects, choose your background, and select ‘apply’

What is fatigue?

Fatigue can be described as a feeling of extreme tiredness and exhaustion both physically and mentally and is caused by many factors. Because fatigue is invisible, it may feel that is not properly understood. It is important to recognise that the fatigue is real and be kind to yourself.

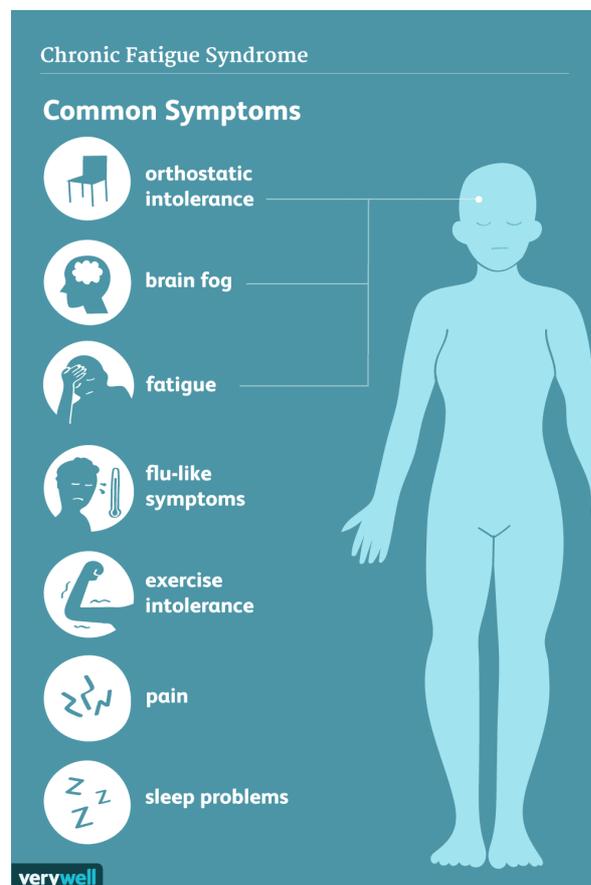
Fatigue can affect all aspects of day-to-day life therefore implementing some strategies may help to reduce the impact of fatigue.

Fatigue management is about learning skills and strategies to manage fatigue symptoms and reduce its impact on quality of life. This booklet provides an overview of strategies and tips to help you manage your fatigue on a day-to-day basis.

Managing fatigue requires a coordinated approach that engages the involvement of family members and friends. It is important for relatives, friends, and employers to understand your fatigue patterns and the principles you are following to manage your fatigue. This understanding will enable them to support you in adjusting your lifestyle.

Common Symptoms

Everything affects fatigue – fatigue affects everything!



Post Exertional Malaise (PEM)

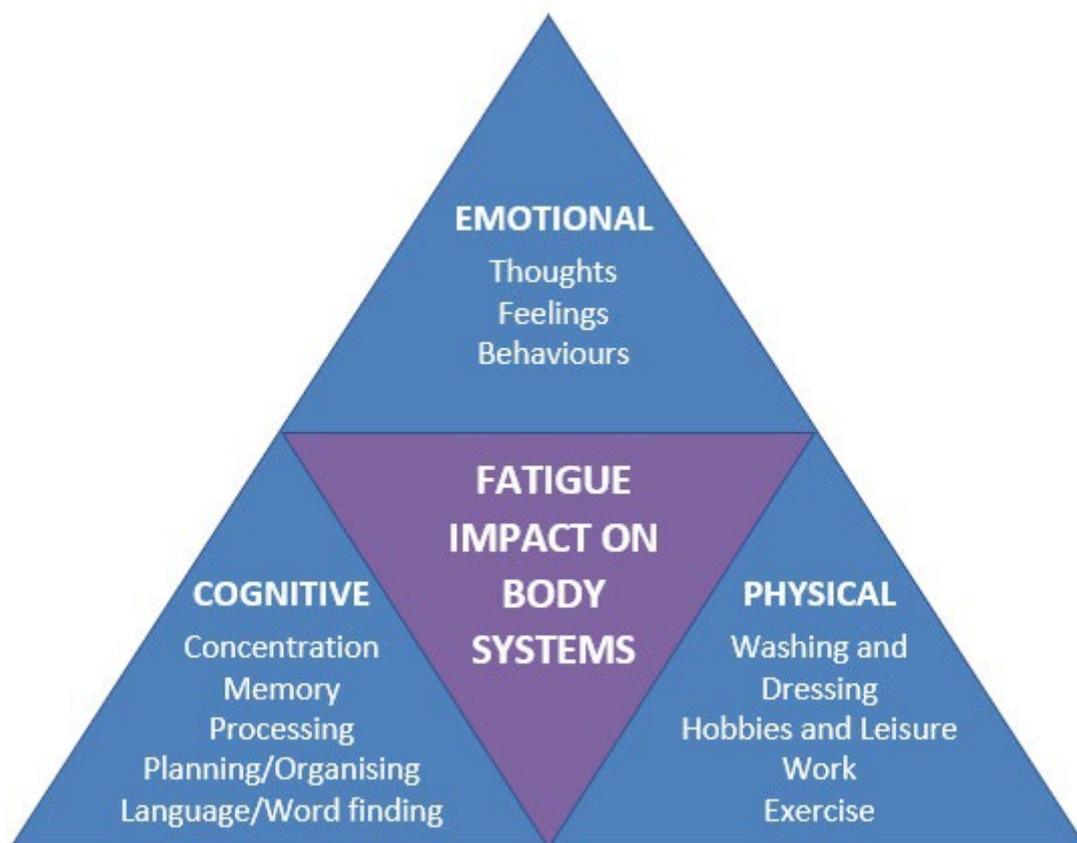
Post exertional malaise is the worsening of symptoms following any form of physical or cognitive activity regardless of how strenuous the activity is. These symptoms usually occur 12-48 hours post exertion and can last for days or even weeks.

During physical activity, our muscles have enough oxygen to produce the energy to complete the task. When you don't have enough oxygen your body switches to anaerobic activity, this uses your energy levels to continue the activity.

When your energy levels are low and unable to complete the activity, you experience an out of proportion increase in your symptoms known as PEM. There are a range of symptoms that you may notice:

- Immediately - difficulty breathing, nausea and dizziness.
- Short term - joint and muscle pains, headaches, brain fog and disturbed sleep patterns
- Long term - decrease in function, weakness, and flu like symptoms.

Fatigue impact on the Mind, Body & Spirit



Challenges to managing fatigue

You are not alone if there are barriers that prevent you from managing your fatigue. Some common barriers include:

Boom-bust - People who go flat out whilst we have some energy available only to collapse with exhaustion after the activity, either straight away or over the subsequent days.

Starter-finishers - People who feel that we must finish what they started. They tend to push through without pacing themselves, inevitably reaching a state of exhaustion.

A lack of self-awareness - Fatigue is the sign that that we have gone past 'the point' at which we needed to stop and rest. We need to stop when we start to feel tired not when we start to feel exhausted.

Feeling deprived - Feeling like we have not achieved anything because some of the day has been taken up with rest, where we could have been more productive, or we have had to postpone an appointment with a friend so that we can rest. Feeling we are losing out when resting and pacing is very common.

Not knowing how to rest - The truth is, a lot of us aren't great at relaxing in practice.

Feeling out of control - Feeling anxious and exhausted but wired - often provide the mental and physical barriers that make us feel out of control.

Inability to take therapeutic rest – Other commitments and responsibilities in our lives may make it very difficult to take the rest breaks we need.

Feeling guilty – Guilt about 'not doing what is expected of ourselves' or guilty if we ask others to help or postponing a job or task is very common.

What are your personal challenges that get in the way of managing your fatigue?

.....

.....

.....

Only once you recognise your challenges will you be able to fully utilise the management strategies.

Activity Diary

Some people find using an activity diary can help to manage their symptoms more effectively. Although it may feel as if you are fatigued 100 per cent of the time, an activity diary can help to pinpoint variations in fatigue during the day and over the course of the week.

An activity diary can help you to identify:

- Overall fatigue levels
- How your fatigue fluctuates during the day and week
- How fatigue is related to activities
- Possible factors that may be contributing to your fatigue
- Other symptoms that vary with fatigue
- Where and how you are spending your energy
- Possible changes in behaviour, equipment or environments that may help to reduce fatigue

If you wish to try using an activity diary, give yourself 5 minutes in the morning, in the afternoon and in the evening to reflect on your day to fill it out. If this is difficult to remember, you could try setting an alarm.

The diary has a traffic light system to better understand at a glance how your days or weeks have been- so look at the amount of red, amber or green activities you have scored and give yourself a final score. For example: was it mostly a red, amber, or green day?

- 0-2 as a **green** activity = no fatigue
- 3 as an **amber** activity = you're starting to feel tired
- 4-5 as a **red** activity = you're very fatigued and needing to rest as you have no more energy.



The traffic light system is helpful when reflecting as to why you may be experiencing a relapse in your symptoms, so keep the diary sheets for when you want to find a pattern to your fatigue.

The diary is also helpful when trying to establish a routine for when you want to implement therapeutic rest breaks into your day, i.e., sandwiched between demanding activities, or find a method to pace out demanding activities into smaller manageable chunks.

Activity Diary Template

Day: SUN / MON / TUES / WEDS / THURS / FRI / SAT

Date:

Describe last night's sleep: _____

Any other comments: _____

Fatigue Rating Scale: 0 = No Fatigue

5 = Extreme Fatigue

Time	Fatigue (0-5)	Activity	Comments
6-7am			
7-8am			
8-9am			
9-10am			
10-11am			
11am-12pm			
12-1pm			
1-2pm			

2-3pm			
3-4pm			
4-5pm			
5-6pm			
6-7pm			
7-8pm			
8-9pm			
9-10pm			
10-11pm			
11pm-12am			

General comments on levels of fatigue today...

.....

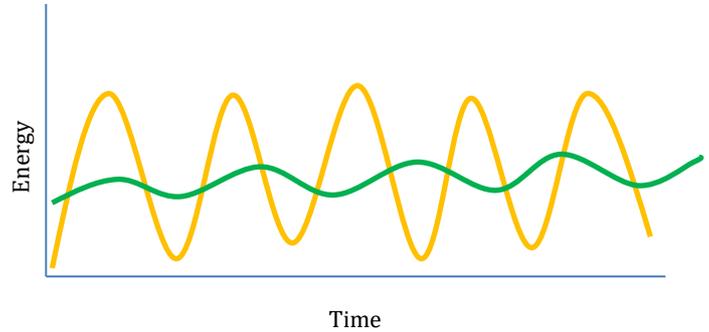
.....



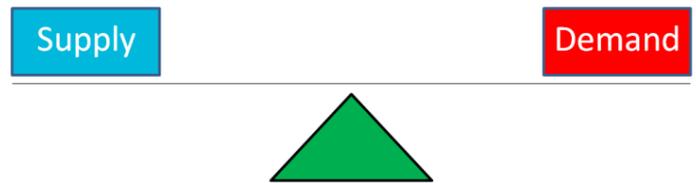
Balancing Energy Levels

Boom & Bust Cycle

Many people find themselves in a 'boom and bust cycle', having peaks and troughs of energy throughout the day. It is important to reduce the peaks and troughs to be consistent with energy use. We encourage you to follow the natural wave of your energy.

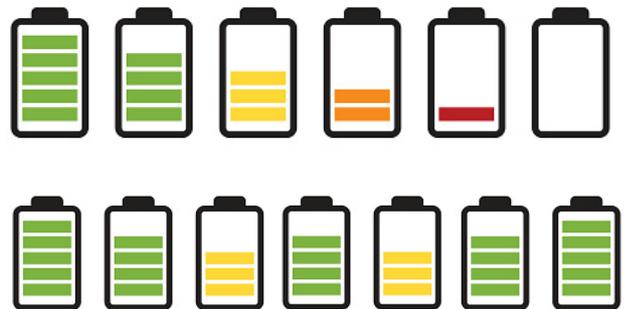


It means finding a level of activity that you can manage daily; this will be different for each person. It is important to ensure that you are balancing your supply (energy levels) and demand (daily activities).



You may like to think of your energy reserves as a battery. If you use up all the energy you must then take time to recharge it.

If you can 'top up' your battery as you go along you will always have some energy in reserve which will reduce your feelings of fatigue. This often means choosing to stop before you are forced to stop, by having 'pre-emptive' therapeutic rest periods. Stopping to recharge your batteries before they are empty is key.



3 P's; Plan, Prioritise & Pace

When you are experiencing fatigue, simple tasks can feel like hard work. One strategy to implement into your daily routine is the 3 P's:

Plan - Look at the activities you normally do on a daily and weekly basis and develop a plan for how you can spread these activities out.

Prioritise - Some daily activities are necessary, but others aren't.

Pace - Pacing yourself will help you have enough energy to complete an activity. When using pacing it is important to stop an activity before you feel fatigued.

Making small changes to daily tasks can help to conserve energy throughout the day.



Plan

What do I need to carry out the job?

What basic activities does each stage involve? e.g. walking, sitting, standing, listening, concentrating etc.

What time of the day is best for me to carry out the activity?



Prioritise

Does it need to be done today?

Can I get someone to help me?

Does it need to be done at all?



Pace

Can I break the job down into different stages?

Can I build rests into the task?

Can I sit and rest where possible?

Below is an example of implementing the 3P's when making the bed:

Plan	Prioritise	Pace
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start and finish one side, then move to the other, so you only circle the bed once. Ensure the bed is positioned so you can walk all the way around it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can you take turns with anyone in the house? Can they make it instead? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Put on the sheet, stop for a rest, then do pillows, stop for a rest etc. Sit for some of the tasks, such as putting on the pillowcases.

You will find further practical advice on how to conserve energy by visiting:

<https://www.rcot.co.uk/conserving-energy>

Breathing

Breathing pattern disorders are patterns of over breathing, where the depth and rate of breath are more than the body needs. Whether you hyperventilate or have dysfunctional breathing, there are several methods that you can use to help:

- Recognising that you are over breathing and changing to a more controlled method of breathing.
- Being aware of normal breathing rates both at rest and during activity.
- Nose breathing rather than breathing through your mouth.
- Abdominal breathing pattern re-training.
- Considering lifestyle factors such as diet, sleep hygiene and relaxation.

Breathing can be used to focus your mind and help with relaxation. Before you can change your breathing to an optimal (more natural) pattern, it's important to recognise how you breathe at the moment. At rest, optimal breathing is approximately 12-16 breaths per minute. The air enters and leaves the nose in a gentle and controlled manner. The main muscle used for breathing is the diaphragm (muscle under the ribcage).

Breathing control

- Breathing control is simply normal breathing, using the lower chest, with relaxation of the upper chest and shoulders.
- To practise breathing control, you should be in a comfortable, well-supported position. Your physiotherapist will advise you on the best position.
- Gently rest one hand on your stomach, keeping your shoulders and upper chest relaxed. Allow your hand to rise gently as you breathe in. If you imagine air filling the abdomen like a balloon inflating this may help. If possible, breathe in through your nose.
- Feel your stomach rise gently and then let the air sigh out. It is important that breathing out is relaxed.
- Ensure your neck and shoulders remain relaxed.
- Gradually try to increase the depth of your breathing whilst maintaining relaxation.
- By doing this you can make your breathing more efficient, thus reducing your breathing rate.

Mastering breathing control doesn't happen easily. It involves trying to retrain the way you breathe – often against years of habit. Try to practice for at least 10 minutes a day when you have some time to yourself without interruptions.

Further information on breathing:

Search:

[Breathing exercises for stress - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)

[Headspace | Mini meditation | Breathe - YouTube](#)

[Deep Breathing Meditation - HelpGuide.org](#)

Voice Fatigue

It is important to note that this may not be affecting you. It commonly affects people who use their voice a lot. Occupational voice users are anyone relying directly or indirectly on their voice use to carry out their work.

An occupational voice disorder is one that develops because of the amount or type of voice use required to do your job. It may also be related to vocal irritants in the work environment or a combination of these factors. Commonly affected are teachers, call centre staff, singers, actors or doctors, salespeople etc.

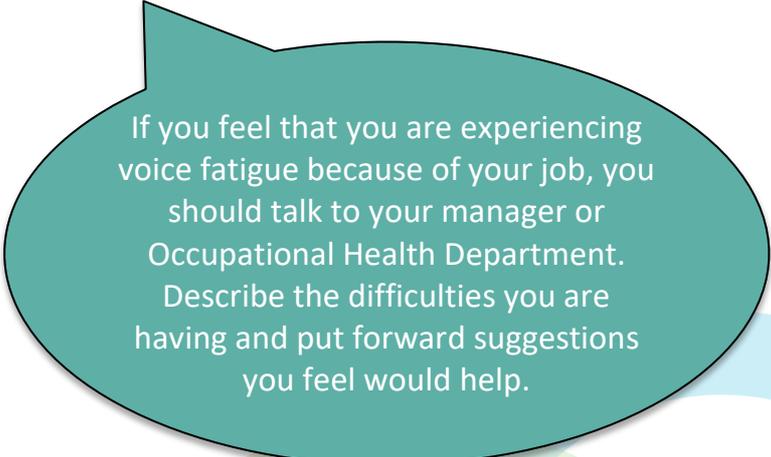
What can affect your voice?

- The amount of voice use
- Noise
- Room acoustics
- Distance between speaker and listener
- Air quality

That said, not all voice disorders are related to the workplace, they could be caused by vocal injuries, infections, medicines, underlying medical conditions or social use.

Whatever the cause, there are some things you can do to help:

- Seek medical help: make sure your larynx is healthy. If speech therapy is offered attend the sessions and practise the work regularly.
- Reduce contributory factors: Get help to give up smoking. Make sure health problems such as acid reflux are treated. Keep to the management plan provided and take any prescribed medications regularly. Reduce voice use in your social life.
- Choose quiet venues and give yourself time to rest your voice.
- Reduce voice use at work: Keep voice use to a minimum at work. Use emails instead of phones where possible. Ask colleagues to share phone work, meetings, and presentations where this can be arranged. Use personal amplification when appropriate (for information on personal amplifiers see: www.lary.org.uk)
- Hydration: Voices work best when they are moist. Make sure you drink plenty of water during the day. Be aware of the drying effect of air conditioning and open windows more often when possible.
- Atmospheric irritants: use any protective masks provided. Make sure the workplace is well ventilated and that extractor fans are turned on. Report any that are faulty to maintenance.



If you feel that you are experiencing voice fatigue because of your job, you should talk to your manager or Occupational Health Department. Describe the difficulties you are having and put forward suggestions you feel would help.

Rest and Relaxation

Therapeutic Rest

Therapeutic rest is how the body recovers from activity, whether the activity is physically or cognitively demanding. It is important to take therapeutic rest breaks to aid with recovering and recharging your energy and fatigue levels.

To start to control your energy and get more stability, it is necessary to reduce the peaks and troughs, so that you have a more even spread of energy throughout the day. This level is called your 'baseline' and finding this is an important step to managing your fatigue. It means finding a level of activity that you can manage daily without increasing your symptoms. Therapeutic rest enables you to take back some control. You choose when you are going rest, rather than rest being symptom dependent.



How to take therapeutic rest

- It is important to create an environment that is peaceful and brings you calmness.
- It is recommended that you take 3 to 4 therapeutic rest breaks per day for up to 20 minutes, but everyone's required level of rest will be different. The amount of time you can take for therapeutic rest breaks will differ depending on your circumstances and daily routines. It is important to create the right balance of rest and activity to avoid over or under resting.
- Find the most comfortable position for you, where you are most supported.
- Techniques may include focusing on your breathing, visualisation, meditation or other relaxation methods. Activities such as talking, reading and watching TV can be just as exhausting as some physical tasks, we recommend that these aren't used during rest breaks.
- The therapeutic rest periods are an essential part of your treatment and recovery. By resting routinely and consistently you are giving your body the chance to heal and begin to recover.

When, Where and How will you take your therapeutic rests?

Where:

When:

How:

Not one single relaxation method works for everyone, therefore, it is important to trial a variety to see what works best for you. Types of approach can be loosely categorised under the following headings:

Good relaxation is a learned skill that becomes easier with practice. Be patient and remember to be kind to yourself!



Auditory

For example, listening to music, or other sounds such as the sea or birdsong



Olfactory

Using pleasant smells to help you unwind. There are lots of 'aroma therapy' products such as scented candles and oils that you can use.



Visualisation and Guided Imagery

Imagining you are in a place that is restful for you can be helpful, try to create as full a picture of this place as possible. Guided Imagery uses all 5 of our senses to help create images in our minds that our body feels are real.



Logical

This approach includes the progressive relaxation techniques which involve focusing on areas of your body e.g., starting at your feet and working up to your head. This technique can help if you are experiencing pain, as you can focus on those areas affected and use mental strategies to soothe the pain.



Breathing

Effective breathing is an important part of most relaxation and meditation techniques. Lie down on your back and get comfortable. Place one hand flat on your upper chest and one just below your rib cage. As you breathe in and out, think about which hand is moving. To breathe with your diaphragm, you should feel the lower hand moving.

You may find it hard to keep focused at first but try to build up the time gradually.

Useful Relaxation Resources:

- Mindful breathing meditation: https://www.rbht.nhs.uk/sites/nhs/files/MP3s/Mindfulness_breathing.MP3 or [Mindful Breathing Meditation - HelpGuide.org](https://www.helpguide.org/meditation/mindful-breathing-01)
- Progressive muscle relaxation: https://www.rbht.nhs.uk/sites/nhs/files/MP3s/Progressive_muscle_relaxation.MP3 or [Progressive Muscle Relaxation Meditation - HelpGuide.org](https://www.helpguide.org/meditation/progressive-muscle-relaxation-01)
- Guided imagery meditation: [Guided relaxation and mindfulness for patients | Royal Brompton & Harefield hospitals \(rbht.nhs.uk\)](https://www.rbht.nhs.uk/sites/nhs/files/MP3s/Guided_imagery_meditation.MP3) or [Guided Imagery Meditation - HelpGuide.org](https://www.helpguide.org/meditation/guided-imagery-01)

Downloadable Free Apps:

- Headspace: Guided Meditation (10 minutes per day for 10 days to help you learn to 'rest' your mind and body)
- Simple Habit (has an ever-changing selection of free sessions – no need to pay)
- Guided Mind (Choose from a big selection of voices and many free sessions)

How will you incorporate rest and relaxation into your daily routine?

What will you do:

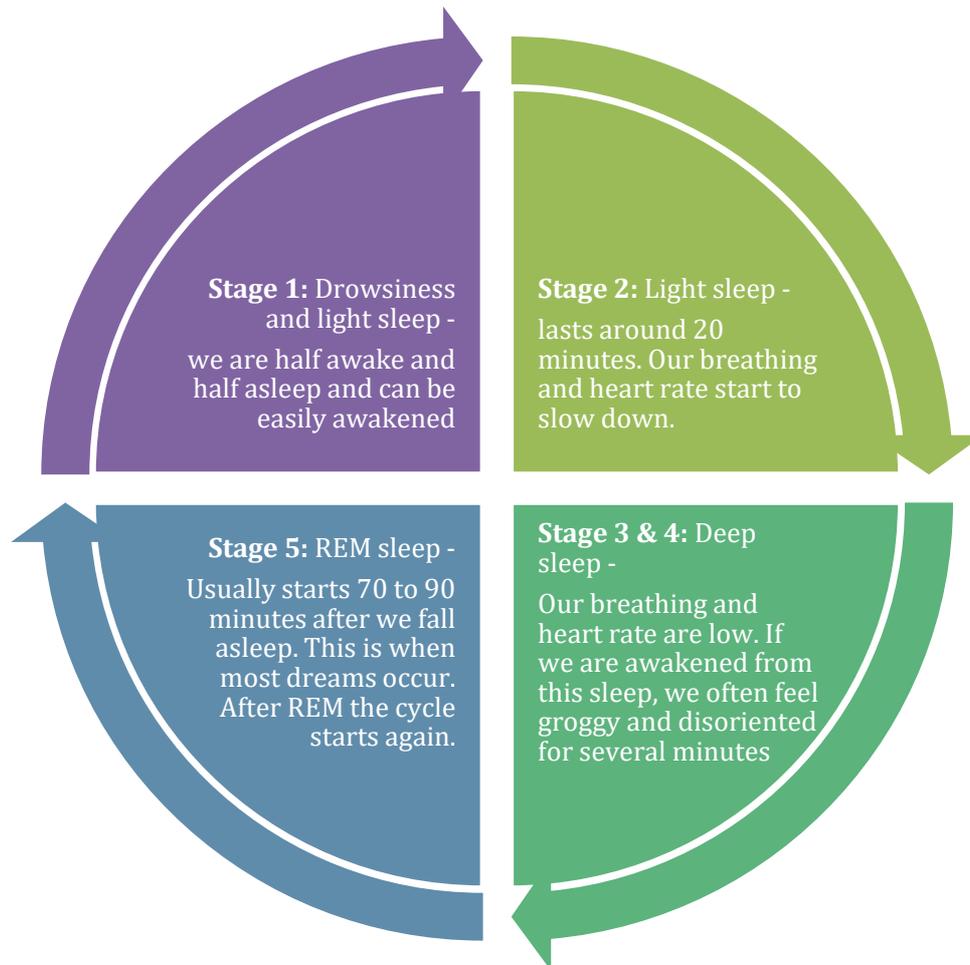
When will you do it:

How often will you do it:

Sleep Management

What is sleep?

Sleep occurs in repeating cycles of approximately 90 minutes, interspersed with brief periods of wakefulness that we don't remember. Each sleep cycle has five stages and is divided into two categories: non-REM (rapid eye movement, which is further split into four stages), and REM sleep:



Common sleep problems for those experiencing fatigue:

- Taking a long time to fall asleep at night
- Frequent or prolonged awakenings during the night
- Waking up early and unable to fall back to sleep
- Sleeping for prolonged periods of time but waking unrefreshed
- Not sleeping enough
- Experiencing distressing dreams

If sleep disturbance is something that you are experiencing, there are some strategies that you could try:

Establish a routine

- Get up at the same time and go to bed at the same time every day including the weekends even if your sleep has been impacted the night before. It may be useful to use an alarm clock to help.
- Go to sleep in the same place every night. For example, in your bed instead of sleeping on the sofa.

Preparing for sleep

- Try to wind down in the hour or so before you go to bed. Include relaxing activities such as having a warm bath, undertaking relaxation exercises and or breathing exercises.
- Avoid stimulating activities which will keep you alert, for example work, studying, watching TV, or listening to the radio, or reading just before bedtime.
- Develop a regular order of doing things, e.g., locking up the house, turning out the lights, brushing your teeth etc. This will act as a signal to your body that it is preparing for sleep.

Problem solving strategy for reducing worries at night

- Lying in bed at night worrying about problems can make you feel tense and prevent you from going to sleep.
- Set aside 20 minutes in the early evening, write down any problems or worries. Write down possible steps to resolve the problems.

If sleep still eludes you...

- Remember that a lack of sleep will not harm you. Lying in bed and resting can be as refreshing as sleep, so savour the moment!
- Try focusing on keeping your eyes open... yes, open! Strange as it sounds, this seems to promote the urge to close them.
- Try a repetitive mental exercise, such as thinking of countries starting with each letter of the alphabet or repeating a phrase.

Guide for Sleep

- A variety of sounds to help you to achieve a better quality of sleep:

<https://www.youtube.com/@SoothingRelaxation>



Re-establishing a good sleep pattern is very important in the overall management of fatigue. Maintaining a regular sleep schedule will help to stabilise your energy levels.

Sleep Diary Template

If you sleep during the day, make note of the time and length of nap in your activity diary.

	Time you went to bed	Time you went to sleep	Did you wake in the night?	How long were you awake?	Time you woke in the morning	Did you nap in the day? If so, for how long?
Monday						
Tuesday						
Wednesday						
Thursday						
Friday						
Saturday						
Sunday						

Any general comments...

.....

.....



Sleep Hygiene

Have a look at the list and tick the relevant boxes. Which do you do, and which don't you do? Don't overthink your responses; the first response is usually the right one. Positive actions can make you feel that you are owning your situation.

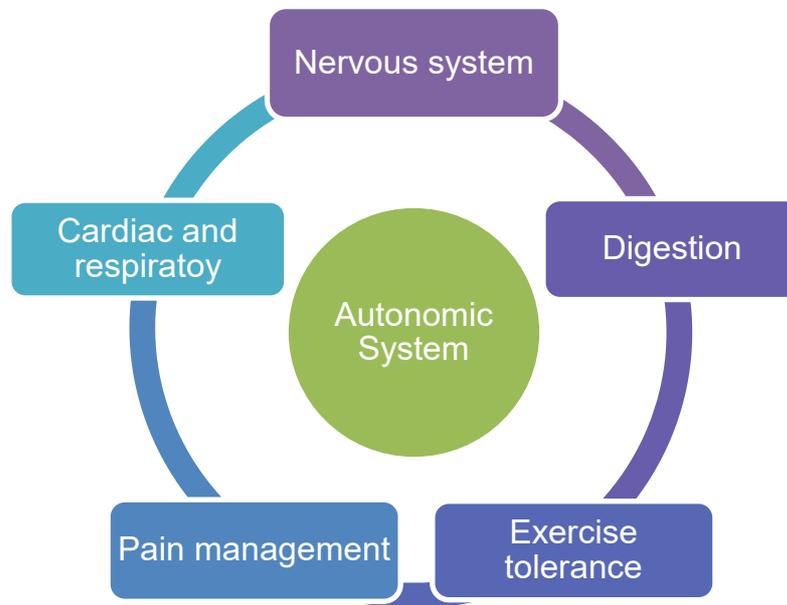
Things that can influence your sleep positively. Do you:	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely
Go to bed and get up the same time every day			
Do some exercise every day			
Get some exposure to bright or outdoor light			
Make your bed and bedroom as comfortable as possible (temperature, noise, light)			
Write down any worries you might have and 'let go' of them until the morning			
Do a relaxation exercise before going to sleep			
Have a warm bath or massage to relax muscles			
Things that can influence your sleep negatively. Do you:	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely
Use electronic devices			
Nap during the day/evening			
Eat heavy meals/rich food prior to going to bed			
Drink alcohol, caffeine, or fizzy drink before bed			
Exercise before bed			
Smoke before going to bed			
Go to bed hungry			
Go to bed when you don't feel sleepy			
Tell yourself to go to sleep			
Engage with mental stimulation before bed, e.g., playing a computer game or having an argument			

Now list three things you can change to improve your sleep hygiene. Be realistic: set goals that are achievable. You can revisit and set new goals as you achieve them.

1.
2.
3.

Physical wellbeing and the autonomic system

Long Covid can disrupt the autonomic system, causing disruption to the body's involuntary functions including breathing, heartbeat, body temperature, how we process pain, our digestive system, immune system, endocrine system and nervous system.



It is important to focus on healthy lifestyle choices to try and help your autonomic system to get back in sync. If you don't stabilise your energy levels before you try and increase your tolerance to activity you can continue in the boom-and-bust cycle of fatigue, and the recovery rate is likely to be much slower with more crashes and relapses.

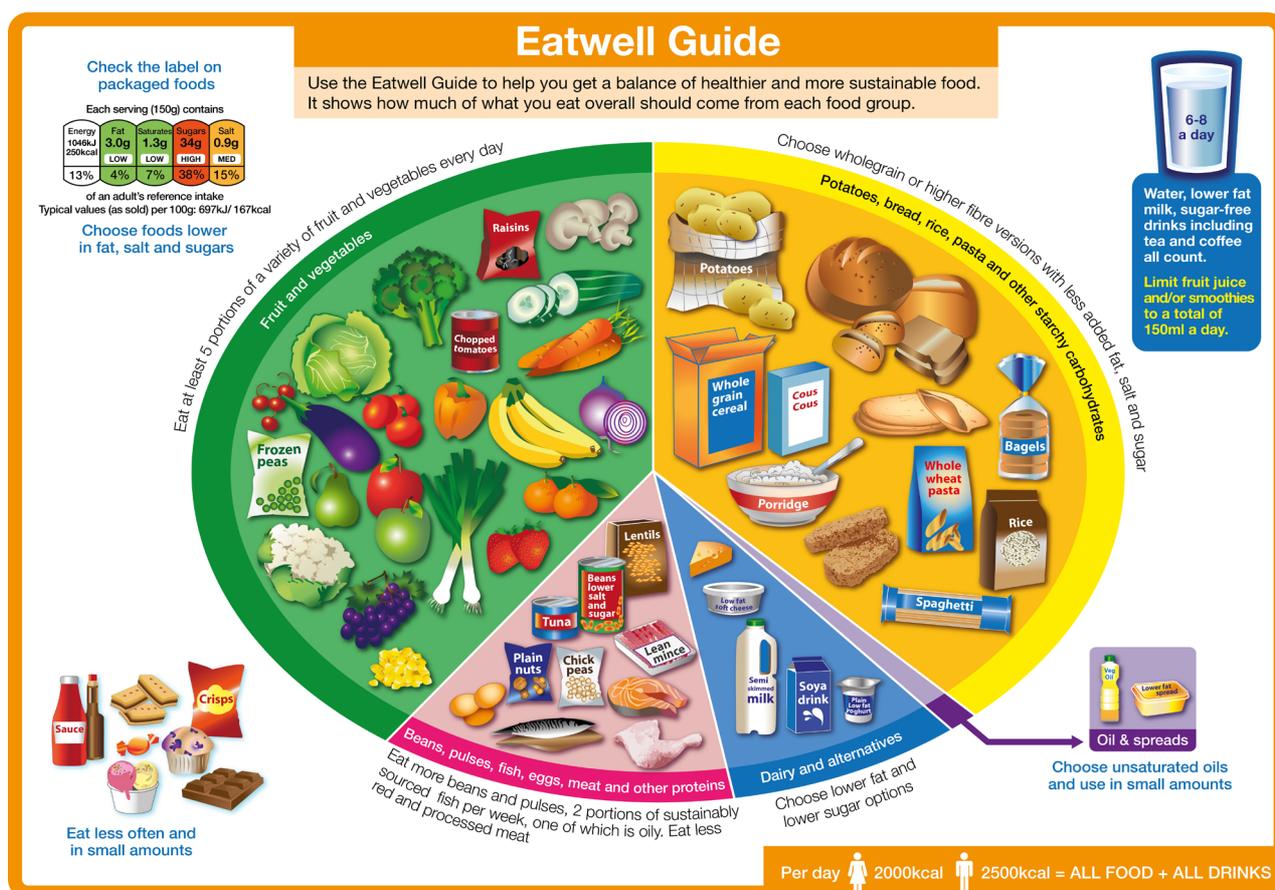
Try to implement the following strategies:

- therapeutic rest to help the body restore and replenish at a cellular level and increase your energy levels.
- gentle relaxation exercises and rest to reduce the symptoms of anxiety and keep the nervous system in a restorative calm state when you can.
- gentle exercise to energise you, aid muscle and joint fitness, maintain activity tolerance, reduce inflammation in the body, manage joint and muscle pain and improve your mental wellbeing and motivation.
- try to maintain a healthy sleep pattern and healthy diet to promote a healthy digestive and immune system, better cognitive function, and to look after your vital organs.

Balanced diet

Eating a healthy, balanced diet is an important part of maintaining good health and can help you feel your best. This means eating a wide variety of foods in the right proportions and consuming the right amount of food and drink to achieve and maintain a healthy body weight.

The Eatwell Guide shows how much of what we eat overall should come from each food group to achieve a healthy, balanced diet. You do not need to achieve this balance with every meal but try to get the balance right over a day or even a week.



Source: Public Health England in association with the Welsh Government, Food Standards Scotland and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland

© Crown copyright 2016

A healthy, balanced diet can:

- reduce your fatigue and boost your energy levels
- improve your muscle strength
- manage your weight changes
- strengthen your immune system
- lessen the impact of changes to smell and taste
- relieve gastrointestinal issues
- improve your mood

Further information on healthy eating:

[Eat well - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

List something that you can change to improve your diet. Be realistic: set goals that are achievable. You can revisit and set new goals as you achieve them.

Physical Activity & Exercise

Physical activity can help people with fatigue to get better in many ways (not all may apply to you), for example, it can:

- Help generate energy
- Improve physical strength.
- Improve physical fitness.
- Help you to do more activity in your day.
- Improve symptoms, e.g., fatigue and muscle pain.
- Improve sleep.
- Help you to feel more relaxed.
- Create a sense of achievement.
- Improve relationships with friends and family and enable you to do things together again.
- Control your weight and feel better about your body.

Can exercise make me worse?

Any activity that is carried out beyond your current physical capability can increase symptoms and make you feel worse. To ensure that this doesn't happen, it is essential to start activities at a low, manageable level and then build up very gradually in your own time. When you start at a level you can comfortably manage (even on your worst days) and build up slowly at a rate that is right for your body, symptoms are controlled and kept to a minimum.

Where do I start?

Start by choosing an activity that you'd like to do or work towards. Having a particular goal is important because it can help to keep you motivated.

To work out what a manageable starting point is for you, consider that you'll be doing the activity for the same amount of time, 5 days out of 7. You must be able to do that:

1. without significantly increasing your symptoms, and
2. without negatively impacting on the other activities, you had planned for that day, you've found the right level for you (your baseline).

If you are in a boom-and-bust pattern but still want to introduce some regular physical activity, consider what amount would be comfortable on a 'bad day' and start at this level. Try to stick to this amount 5 days out of 7, even if you're having a better day; increasing the amount of activity on a better day will simply reinforce 'boom and bust'. This is important because if you go over your planned level and you feel awful the next day, then you can't continue with your programme and get fitter.

Building up your Baseline

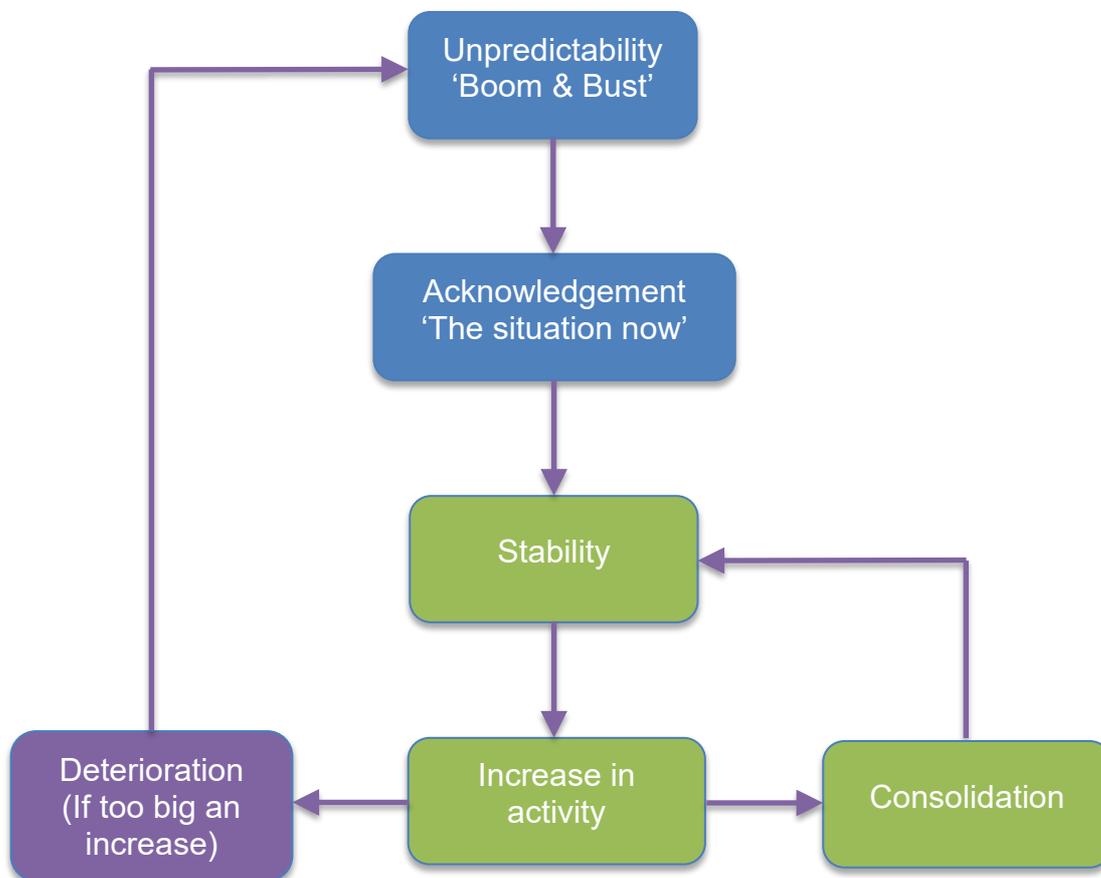
Your baseline is a level of activity that is sustainable even when you are experiencing fluctuating levels of energy. There is no simple formula to finding your baseline, and it can take a long time to find the right level for you. However, once you have established your baseline, you can gradually build up your activity level at a pace which is achievable for you. With a baseline, you are trying to find a level of activity that you can manage that does not cause excessive levels of fatigue. Your fatigue levels may still fluctuate but by avoiding 'over activity' or 'excessive rest' it stays within a more stable range.

'Over activity' or 'excessive rest' will be different for each person. You can identify your baseline by looking at what you are currently doing and where your energy is going across the day and week. You may find it helpful to use your activity diary to monitor your progress and fatigue levels.

Many people find it helpful to alternate small flexible amounts of physical and cognitive activities with a longer period of rest/ relaxation in between. Physical activities could include light household tasks and going for a short walk – when you feel ready to do so.

Remember, you decide when you're ready to do a little more. Equally, your baseline is flexible and may be slightly reduced if you have a setback.

Building up your baseline: Recovery model



Managing Pain

Pain is a commonly reported symptom by people recovering from COVID-19. It can be in specific regions of the body (joint pain, muscle pain, headaches, chest pain and abdominal pain) or generalized and widespread. Persistent pain (lasting for more than three months) can be disabling and affects sleep, fatigue levels, mood and your ability to concentrate or work. If you experience specific pain symptoms, such as chest pain, that are aggravated by activity, you should consult a healthcare professional.

Advice on managing pain

- For joint, muscle or generalised pain, you can take non-prescription analgesics such as paracetamol or ibuprofen with food. Healthcare professionals can advise on medications that can help with pain that is not responding to over-the-counter analgesics.
- It can be difficult to completely eliminate persistent pain. Aim to make the pain manageable to allow you to function and sleep better, and to engage in essential daily activities.
- Sleeping well can help reduce pain symptoms. Timing the use of pain medications to coincide with sleep might be helpful if pain is interfering with your sleep.
- Distraction exercises such as listening to relaxing music or meditation can also help reduce pain levels.
- Pacing daily activities is one of the key tools for managing your pain. Gentle exercise also helps release the body's internal chemicals, called endorphins, which help reduce pain levels.

Persistent Pain Links

Search:

- [Action On Pain \(action-on-pain.co.uk\)](https://www.action-on-pain.co.uk)
- [Helpful Advice | Action On Pain \(action-on-pain.co.uk\)](https://www.action-on-pain.co.uk)
- [Pain Self Management by Pete Moore | The Pain Toolkit](#)
- [Pain Management free meditation for pain relief | Meditainment](#)
- [Tame The Beast — It's time to rethink persistent pain - YouTube](#)

Maintaining your Mental Wellbeing

If you're feeling anxious or stressed, these strategies may help:

- Take a time-out: Practice yoga, listen to music, meditate, or use relaxation techniques. Stepping back from the problem helps clear your head.
- Make time for enjoyable activities and set yourself positive boundaries ahead of social events.
- Eat well-balanced meals: Don't skip meals and keep healthy snacks to hand.
- Limit alcohol and caffeine: these can exacerbate anxiety and panic attacks.
- Get enough sleep: When stressed, your body needs additional sleep and rest.
- Exercise daily: to help you feel good and maintain your health.
- Take deep breaths: Inhale and exhale slowly.
- Count to 10 slowly: Repeat, and count to 20 if necessary.
- Do your best: Instead of aiming for perfection, be proud of however close you get.
- Accept that you cannot control everything
- Put your stress in perspective: Is it really as bad as you think?
- Welcome humour: A good laugh goes a long way.
- Maintain a positive attitude: Try to replace negative thoughts with positive ones.
- Get involved: Volunteer or find another way to be active in your community, which creates a support network and gives you a break from everyday stress.
- Learn what triggers your anxiety: Is it work, family, or something else you can identify? Write in a journal when you're feeling stressed or anxious and look for a pattern.
- Talk to someone: Tell friends and family you're feeling overwhelmed and let them know how they can help you. Talk to your GP for professional help.
- Allow yourself worry time: Set your worry time at the same time each day and get into the habit of writing worries down as they pop into your head and tell yourself you will think about them at your set time.
- Pause negative people: Surround yourself with positive people. Look for positive news stories: <https://www.goodnewsnetwork.org/>
- Don't spend too much time on social media: this can be sensationalised and often negative and worrying.



Useful Resources:

www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/tips-and-support/how-to-be-happier/

[Self-care for anxiety - Mind;](#) [Anxiety - Every Mind Matters - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)

[Managing Anxious Thoughts And Stress With Mindfulness - YouTube](#)

[10-Minute Meditation to Reframe Stress - YouTube](#)

Grounding Techniques



5,4,3,2,1

Notice - notice what you see around you. 5 things you see, 4 things you hear, 3 things you feel, 2 things you can smell and 1 thing you can taste or you like the taste of.



Focus on the Present

Focus your mind and re-orientate yourself in place and time by asking yourself some or all of these questions:

Where am I?

Is it warm or cold?

What is the date, month and year?

What am I wearing?



Positive Thinking

Think about your personal qualities - list at least 5 of them, then reaffirm each of these qualities by writing down examples of your positive quality in action.

Identify your achievements - what have you done that you have been really pleased with. Focus on your personal achievements.

What strategies will you use to help you manage any stress or anxiety?

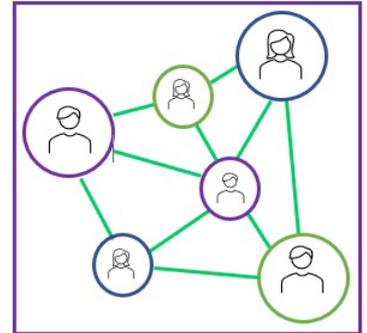
What will you do: |

When will you do it: |

How often will you do it: |

Social support

After the pandemic some people feel anxious about going out and socialising again. Some feel they can't tolerate going outside for long or want to stay indoors to prevent triggering fatigue. This can feel very isolating and lonely, and we know it's so important to continue doing meaningful and joyful activities, as well as the hum drum "have to do" activities - to feel motivated and energised and feel that our days are worthwhile. It is understandable to have some anxiety about getting out and socialising again, but as time passes the anxiety is likely to reduce.



If this has become an issue for you, there are lots of things you can do to help:

- Seek out some peer support – perhaps join a group either face-to-face or online
- Join an online yoga or mindfulness group (such as [Suzy Bolt, YouTube](#))
- Ask your GP practice about your local Social Prescribers – these are experts in providing you with contacts and support networks within your local community
- Think about a new meaningful activity you could try – this could be a new hobby or volunteering – this provides an opportunity to meet new people and learn new skills.
- Plan social occasions – arrange to meet with friends or family but prepare for any potential challenges ahead of time as this will help you to feel more comfortable and in control.
- Go at your own pace – only do what is comfortable for you to ease back into socialising
- Do not avoid things entirely as this can make it even harder in the longer term.
- Discuss your concerns with others – before socialising, talk to them about the situation, and what feels comfortable to you, so that everyone is on the same page
- Continue to pace and ensure you make time to relax
- Challenge unhelpful thoughts – it's natural to feel worried sometimes, but it's helpful to separate unhelpful thoughts from helpful ones. You might find it useful to write your thoughts down.
- Focus on the present – make plans but try not to dwell on the "what ifs"
- Think about what is best for you – seek out appropriate social support that is best for you and meets your needs now but remember this may change over time.

Further information

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) and mental wellbeing - Every Mind Matters - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)

[Tips to manage loneliness - Mind](#)

Goal Setting

Goal Setting allows you to focus on yourself and spend some time doing something that you want to do. It also helps to put other self-management strategies and tools into practice. No matter how big or small a goal – making change requires planning and SMART goal setting:

- Specific - What? When? How Much or How Often?
- Measurable - So that you can track your progress
- Achievable - You should feel confident that you will achieve your goal
- Relevant - Something you want to do
- Time Linked - Putting an end point to the goal gives a clear target to work towards

Week One: The goal I would like to achieve this week is...

What will you do:

When will you do it:

How much or how often will you do it:

Is this achievable?

Week Two: The goal I would like to achieve this week is...

What will you do:

When will you do it:

How much or how often will you do it:

Is this achievable?

Week Three: The goal I would like to achieve this week is...

What will you do:

When will you do it:

How much or how often will you do it:

Is this achievable?

Summary

Taking fatigue management forward

Fatigue is complex and it is a difficult concept to explain or understand. It is important to remember that you are working to identify what works for you in terms of fatigue management. You are the best qualified person to discover the methods of fatigue management that most suit you as the experience of fatigue varies greatly from one person to another and from one day to the next. It takes some time to embed strategies into your daily life, it may be helpful to take some time to complete the following:

What strategies, skills and information have I found most useful?

.....
.....

What factors seem to be triggering or contributing to my fatigue?

.....
.....

What factors seem to alleviate or lessen my fatigue?

.....
.....

Are there any barriers that get in the way of managing my fatigue?

.....
.....

Expect setbacks in your progress with managing fatigue, it's normal to have days when symptoms or life's challenges seem harder to deal with. You can use this as a way of learning new things about yourself and perhaps gain some insight into how to cope differently in the future.

Further Support

Helpful websites

[Long Covid & Post-Exertional Malaise: what is it and how to manage it? | covid:aid \(covidaidcharity.org\)](https://covidaidcharity.org/)

[Your COVID Recovery | Supporting your recovery after COVID-19](#)

[Every Mind Matters - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

www.mind.org.uk

Health in Mind- Telephone: 0300 00 30 130, Lines open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 5.00pm Email: spnt.healthinmind@nhs.net website: www.healthinmind.org.uk

Patient Advice & Liaison Service (PALS)

Offer free confidential help and advice to our patients, relatives, and carers.

They can:

- Assist you with finding support and information about your treatment or visit and help resolve questions about our services.
- Provide information about other local NHS, community and support services and provide information on the NHS complaints process.
- Listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries about our hospital services and feed them back to the Trust. Both positive and negative comments help us to continually improve the patient experience.
- Help resolve problems that service users may have experienced either as an inpatient, outpatient, or visitor to the hospital.

Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust PALS

Tel: 01273 242292

Email: sc-tr.pals@nhs.net

East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust PALS

Tel: 0300 131 5309

Email: esh-tr.palsh@nhs.net