

## Therapy

# Psychological Wellbeing and Thinking Abilities

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way health services are operating. Whilst in hospital, you will have noticed staff wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as masks, visors, gowns, and gloves. At a time when you value family visiting you, this has not been able to happen. For some people, this has led to feelings of isolation and low mood.

Generally, when we have spoken to patients who have suffered from COVID – 19, they have reported the following symptoms:

- Tiredness (fatigue)
- Shortness of breath
- Body aches
- Loss of taste
- Sore throat
- Cough
- Headache
- Fever

Along with experiencing some of these physical symptoms, people who had a stay on the Intensive Care Unit or High Dependency Unit have also reported some of the following symptoms:

- Issues with memory
- Effects on attention, and mental processing speed
- Fear of stigma or passing the infection onto other people
- Anxiety and/or low mood
- Feeling confused
- Difficulties sleeping
- Suffering from nightmares.



## Patient Information

It's very important to note that the symptoms reported above can be common problems because of the virus, and it is hoped with time and recovery, these should get better. In fact, many patients who have had severe illness experience positive thoughts and feelings, for instance feeling thankful or wanting to help others.

This leaflet gives some helpful techniques to manage some of your symptoms during and after your stay in hospital.

Please remember, symptoms of COVID-19 are different for each person, so all the techniques shown here may not help you. Please have a look through and use the ones which you can do, and which apply to you.

If you have any questions, please ask your allocated nurse to contact one of the Psychology Team on your ward before you leave hospital.

### **Cognitive Functioning**

This refers to mental abilities such as learning, memory, attention, reasoning, planning, problem solving and more. Some patients have reported issues with some of these abilities after having COVID-19. This can be worrying for you if you experience this, however, please be reassured that for most people, these abilities will go back to your normal with time.

If you find that you continue to struggle with your mental abilities and this impacts on your daily functioning, please be aware that there are services that can assess these abilities and provide your rehabilitation where required.

At first, these difficulties should be discussed with your GP, or hospital Consultant, who will be able to refer you to the most appropriate Neuropsychology Service.

## Patient Information

Some of the following can help you in the meantime:

- Try to relax.
- Avoid distractions when doing tasks.
- Ensure you're not tired as this can affect mental processes.
- Write things down.
- Chunk tasks into manageable sizes.
- Try activities such as solving puzzles and word searches to keep your mind active.

## Managing Tiredness

Tiredness is a common symptom in coronavirus. Being tired can make you feel less motivated to keep active, and make you avoid activities. This can lead to you having even less energy, which can make you more tired. If this behaviour becomes a habit, the cycle can be difficult to break.

We cannot take away your tiredness completely, but there are several ways you can manage it.

Here are some ideas to help you manage your fatigue.

### Pacing

- Slow down your activities, as this will take less energy.
- Slow down when you talk, eat or cough. These actions can affect your breathing pattern.
- Break larger tasks down into more manageable parts.
- Avoid carrying heavy items.
- Take the time each day to try to relax.
- Remember, it is better to take a little extra time to complete a task and be able to continue, rather than finish the task quickly and feel tired afterwards.

### **Expectations**

If we fail to meet expectations that we place on ourselves, it can have an impact on our mood and motivation. Recognise when you are placing high expectations on yourself and think about giving yourself permission to do things in a different way that helps with your energy levels.

- Try to be patient with yourself.
- Give yourself time to do things.
- Keep track of the things that you are achieving by writing them down (this will also help you to see you are moving forwards even if progress seems slow).
- Try not to feel disappointed if your recovery seems to be slow – no two people will recover at the same rate.
- Be kind to yourself.

### **Activity**

Try to stay as active as you can. A little regular, gentle exercise each day can make a big difference. Perhaps try a gentle walk, a little bit of gardening, some yoga or other exercise you enjoy. Remember to gradually return to exercise and slowly increase how much exercise you do.

### **Sleeping**

Sleep disturbance can contribute to us feeling tired and low in mood, which in turn can have an impact on recovery. Even if you are not sleeping at night, try not to sleep during the day. If you do need to sleep during the day, try to keep this down to a short nap rather than a prolonged sleep.

Remember these symptoms will likely improve as you get better.

### **Managing Worries**

Being unwell and suffering from breathlessness can often cause anxiety and feelings of panic. Anxiety can make the feeling of breathlessness stronger, which leads to more anxiety.

It is possible to try to control the level of anxiety, and relaxation is one way of doing this.

### **Preparing for relaxation**

If relaxation is a new skill you are learning, in the beginning it is not always easy, but the more you practice, the easier and more effective you will find it. Try to find some time each day to practice. If life is busy, tell your family that you'll need 20 minutes to yourself each day to practise the techniques. Choose an area of your house that you find comfortable.

### **Relaxation exercises**

Sometimes, people find it helpful to have someone read the following exercises out to them the first few times until they become familiar.

### **Visualisation**

Visualising a relaxing scene with your imagination can often help you feel more relaxed. It could be your favourite place, a holiday destination you've been on, or somewhere else you know well. Think about somewhere that makes you feel happy and secure.

Here are some examples that you might like to try.

### **Letting go of thoughts**

- Spend a few moments thinking about the pace of your breathing.
- Close your eyes and imagine that you are sitting on the bank of a river.
- You are warm and relaxed, the sun is shining down on you, and you can breathe freely.
- You see many leaves slowly drifting downstream.
- You can hear the sound of the running water, and the birds.
- When a thought or feeling comes into your mind, try to see this as a leaf and let it drift away from you, then disappear.
- When it's gone, return to gazing at the river, waiting for the next leaf to float by with a new thought.
- Try not to think about the contents of each leaf. Just observe it and then let it go.
- Don't allow yourself to be concerned with these thoughts. Just watch them pass in front of you.

### **Body scan**

Begin by focusing your attention on your feet, trying to release the tension in your muscles.

- First think of your toes, then work up through your ankles to your calves and shins, over your knees and along your thighs.
- Notice how loose your legs feel now.
- Become aware of your tummy and then your chest. Feel the tension releasing in your body.
- Now think of your shoulders, travel down to your elbows, through your forearms, and into your wrists, hands, and fingers.
- Become aware of your fingertips.
- Notice how loose your arms feel now.
- Next, focus your attention on your lower back and pelvis. Try to release any tension you are feeling here.
- Allow this feeling of looseness to rise up your back, to the back of your chest and shoulder blades.
- Continuing up into your neck and scalp, to the crown of your head.
- Slowly begin to focus on your forehead and move down to your jaw.
- Imagine that you have a giant paint brush sweeping over your body, following the same route, and creating a feeling of calm and relaxation.
- Feel that every part of your body is relaxed.
- When you finish your relaxation exercise, become aware of your real surroundings by listening to the sounds around you.
- Be aware of how relaxed you feel.
- Start to move very gently by stretching your arms and legs before you move from your position.

### **Looking After Your Mental Health**

It's normal to feel worried about coronavirus. This is an uncertain time, and you might be feeling bored, lonely, anxious, frustrated, or low. It's important to remember that, for most people, these feelings will pass. Here are some things that you can do to look after your mental health during the coronavirus pandemic:

## Patient Information

- Stay connected with friends and family.
- Talk about your worries.
- Carry on doing things you enjoy.
- If possible, keep on getting support for your physical and mental health difficulties. Many healthcare providers can offer phone or video appointments.
- Eat healthy meals and drink enough water.
- Exercise regularly.
- Try not to drink too much alcohol.
- Try to maintain a regular sleeping pattern.

If you find that these feelings of worry persist, and that they start to interfere with your everyday life, it is important to contact your GP who will be able to advise you. If you have a follow up appointment with a hospital Consultant, this can be discussed with them. There are many services to help people to manage these issues, so please don't suffer alone and in silence.

## Helpful Resources

<https://covidpatientsupport.lthtr.nhs.uk/#/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>

<https://www.covwarkpt.nhs.uk/IAPT>

## Helpful Contact Numbers

If you require any further help, please contact:

- Coventry and Warwickshire MIND on 02476 552847
- The Samaritans on 116123
- Mental Health Matters on 0800 616 171 or 0300 330 5487 (free from a mobile).

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this Information in another language or format, please contact the Therapy Department on 024 7696 6013 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

## Patient Information

The Trust operates a smoke free policy.

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