

Managing Fatigue

Initial Management of Fatigue

Information for patients following a viral infection

It is common to experience fatigue during, and when recovering from, an illness caused by a viral infection (such as COVID-19). This is part of the body's normal response to help it fight a viral infection. Most people will feel less fatigued once the infection has gone, although it may take some time to return to normal activity levels. During, or immediately after a viral infection, it may be helpful to follow the below guidance to help recovery and reduce the likelihood of ongoing difficulties with fatigue.

Rest



Getting good quality rest can help your body to fight the infection. It is important to rest both your mind and your body. Focus on getting quality rest by using relaxation, breathing and meditation strategies. You might need more sleep than usual at this time.

Move



Gentle movement, regularly throughout the day, helps circulation and is good for your body. If you are too unwell to get out of bed, then try to stretch and move within your bed.

Keep activity levels low



Do low levels of both physical and mental activities. Try and do only a few basic activities each day and take regular breaks to rest. Try and include low-level activities that are enjoyable to support good mental health.

Nourish



A balanced diet and fluid intake is important. If you have lost your appetite, try eating smaller amounts more regularly. When you are ill and struggling with fatigue, it may be difficult to shop and cook. If possible, ask for support from others.

Allow time



Viral infections (like COVID-19) affect people differently. Give yourself time to recover and try to manage the expectations you place on yourself. It may be recommended to stop work/study until you feel well again. You may need to reduce or ask for support with other responsibilities at home.

Further support for ongoing fatigue

Recovery from a viral infection will be different for each person. It can take several months (or sometimes a year or more) for people to fully recover from post-viral fatigue. If there is no improvement in your fatigue after 4 months and attempts to follow the above guidance have been made, then please seek further support from your GP as you may require further tests and referral to specialist services.

Additional Information and resources

- **The British Association for CFS/ME (BACME)** have produced more detailed guidelines on managing post-viral fatigue. These are available from <https://www.bacme.info/>
- **Action For ME** – A charity that provides further information and resources for those with chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS/ME): <https://www.actionforme.org.uk/>
- **Living Life** – Free online self-help courses available for those living with chronic conditions and experiencing low mood or stress: <https://littf.com/>
- **Access to Work** – Disability Employment Advisor via Job Centre Plus, also for information on reasonable adjustments at work and access to work: www.direct.gov.uk
- **Breathing Space** – A free confidential phone line for anyone in Scotland who is feeling low, anxious or depressed. Phone **0800 83 85 87** (Mon-Thurs 6pm-2am, Fri-Mon 6pm-6am)
- **Apps**— If you have a smart phone you may wish to try using apps to help you get good quality rest. Some popular mindfulness and relaxation apps include: Insight Timer, Calm, Headspace, Breethe, Ten Percent Happier and Simple Habit.

Acknowledgements

This information was written by the Lothian ME/CFS Rehabilitation Service and was based on the British Association for CFS/ME (BACME) guidelines for managing Post-Viral Fatigue.