

Westfield Health

What to do if you have coronavirus

A guide to looking after
yourself if you think you
have COVID-19

www.westfieldhealth.com





About Westfield Health

We're dedicated to making a healthy difference to the quality of life of our customers and the communities in which they live and work.

We inspire and empower each other to be the best that we can be, so we can deliver evidence-based health and wellbeing solutions that support people, communities, and workplaces to be healthier.

We're proud of our not for profit heritage and are passionate about making a healthy difference. We have no shareholders, so the more successful we are the more we can give back to those around us.

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Introduction

There's an overwhelming number of articles hitting the headlines about coronavirus. From fake news to fake cures, it can be hard to differentiate fact from fiction causing even more stress if you're feeling under the weather.

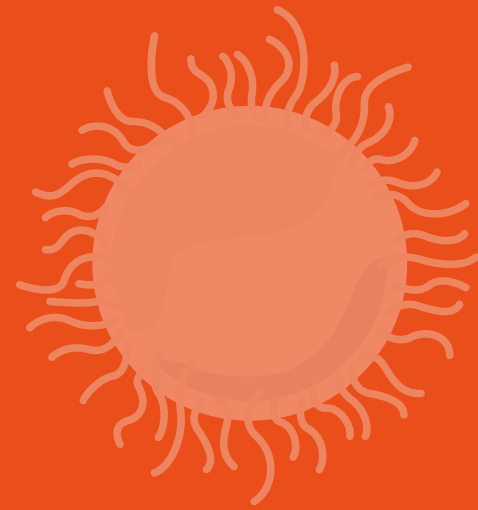
In this guide we've summarised key pieces of Government and NHS advice on what to do and how to look after yourself and those around you if you think you have coronavirus.

When it comes to treating COVID-19, there is no cure available at the moment. As it's caused by a virus not a bacteria, antibiotics won't work on coronavirus.

As most people experience mild or moderate symptoms, the current treatment for COVID-19 is self-care at home to minimise symptoms and help you feel comfortable.

This guide will walk you through how our bodies respond to a new virus, the guidelines on taking care of yourself and what to do if you're not feeling better.

Understanding COVID-19



Understanding more about coronavirus and the effect it has on our body may help reduce anxiety about the illness and help you understand what to expect if you do catch COVID-19.

What is COVID-19?

There's a family of viruses called coronaviruses that are common all over the world. COVID-19 is a new strain of this type of virus that originated in Wuhan last year.

The main symptoms are fever, a cough and shortness of breath. Sufferers may also feel tired and have aches and pains.

If this progresses to pneumonia, it can cause breathing difficulties that require urgent medical support.

Like seasonal flu, it is more dangerous for older people, those with weaker immune systems and people with long-term health conditions.

How does our immune system react to viruses?

To understand how COVID-19 affects our physical health, it's good to know how our immune system responds to a virus it hasn't seen before.

There are two parts to our immune system's response: a quick-fire initial reaction and a longer, more specific response to the exact virus or bacteria it's fighting.

The first part is called the innate immune system. Its job is to detect the virus and create an initial response aimed at limiting its spread.

This first response isn't specific to the virus, but a broad anti-viral response. It also causes side effects that can make us feel under the weather, such as headaches, fever and muscle aches.

"This response serves two purposes: to slow down the replication and spread of the virus, keeping us alive until the 'acquired immune response' kicks in (which, for a virus we haven't seen, is about 2 to 3 weeks)," explains Dr Michael Skinner, Reader in Virology at Imperial College London.



Did you know...

You can check the number of cases in your area on [Public Health England's COVID-19 Dashboard](#).

The immune response

Part 1 - innate response

- A quick initial response triggered as soon as a virus is detected
- Aims to limit the virus's spread
- Causes inflammation in the body and side effects such as headaches and fever

Part 2 - acquired immune response

- Kicks in c. 2 weeks after detection for a new virus
- Response is specific to that virus
- Tells the innate response to stand down

Expert insight

Dr Michael Skinner, Reader in Virology, Imperial College London

How much of a virus is needed to make you ill?

"The actual minimum number varies between different viruses and we don't yet know what that 'minimum infectious dose' is for COVID-19.

"When that dose reaches our respiratory tract, one or two cells will be infected and will be re-programmed to produce many new viruses within 12-24 hours (for COVID-19, we don't yet know how many or over how long).

"The new viruses will infect many more nearby cells (which can include cells of our immune defence system too, possibly compromising it) and the whole process goes around again, and again, and again."

Coronavirus symptoms



At the moment testing for the coronavirus is not widespread in the UK. Based on the symptoms below, the NHS is asking people to self-isolate if they think they might have the virus.

What to look out for

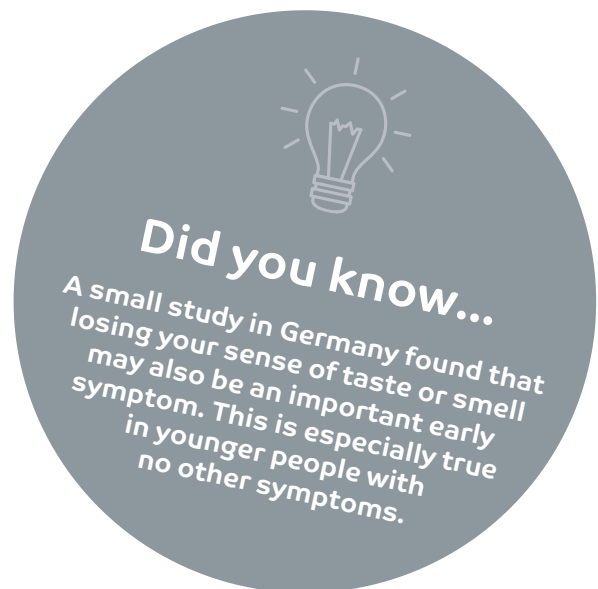
Coronavirus can cause pneumonia-like symptoms such as coughs, fever and in more severe cases breathing difficulties.

It is understood that symptoms appear between two and tens days after contracting the virus, but it may be as long as 24 days.

Some people become infected but don't develop any symptoms and don't feel unwell.

The main symptoms of coronavirus are:

- **A high temperature:** Normal body temperature for adults is 37° Celsius when taken orally. A fever is a temperature of 38° Celsius or higher. If you don't have a thermometer, look out for flushed skin on your chest/back or being hot to the touch as this may indicate you may have a fever.



- **A new, continuous cough:** This could either be coughing a lot for more than an hour or several coughing episodes in a 24-hour period (three or more).

Patients with coronavirus may also feel very tired and have muscle aches, a bit like when you have flu.

How to take your temperature correctly

These instructions are for taking your temperature orally using a digital thermometer.

If you have an in-ear thermometer, please follow the instructions provided with the device.

- 1) Choose the right time:** Don't take your temperature right after eating or drinking. The temperature of the food or drink may affect the accuracy of the reading. Similarly, avoid taking your temperature after taking a hot shower/bath or after exercising.
- 2) Clean & prepare:** Wash the part of your thermometer you put in your mouth with soap and cold water. Rinse and dry it thoroughly.
- 3) Measure:** Put the thermometer into your mouth, under your tongue towards the back of your mouth. Close your lips around the thermometer and breathe through your nose, not your mouth.
- 4) Read:** Once you hear the thermometer beep, take it out of your mouth and look at the temperature reading.
- 5) Stay consistent:** If you're tracking your temperature throughout your illness, try and put the thermometer in the same spot in your mouth each time. This way you'll be able to tell if your temperature is creeping up or starting to go down.

Understanding treatment guidelines



Once you're sure - or as sure as you can be - that you have COVID-19, the first step is to self-isolate. The next step is to take good care of yourself at home to help your body fight the virus.

The current estimate is that around 80% of people who test positive for the illness will only have mild symptoms.

Most people will be expected to stay at home and recover to stop them from infecting anyone else at a GP surgery, hospital or when going about their daily activities. It's particularly important to help prevent vulnerable people from catching the virus.

As COVID-19 is a virus not a bacteria, it can't be treated with antibiotics.



What to do if you develop symptoms

If you're classed as vulnerable

Those that are classed as vulnerable should call 111 if they develop symptoms of COVID-19.

This includes those who are over 70, have a pre-existing medical condition or have been advised by the NHS that they should be 'shielding' (staying isolated for 12 weeks).

If you're not classed as vulnerable

You don't need to contact your GP or 111 to let them know you have coronavirus.

The NHS advises self-care at home to try and make yourself as comfortable as possible.

If you have the symptoms outlined on page 6, here are the steps to follow:

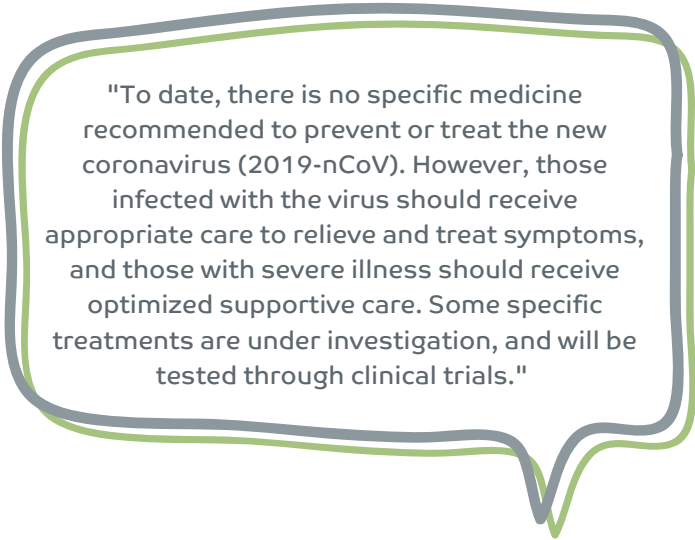
- 1) Do not go to a GP surgery, pharmacy or hospital.
- 2) Self-isolate: avoid going outside at all and distance yourself from other people in the household.
- 3) Look after yourself at home, taking steps to minimise the symptoms, such as taking paracetamol, drinking plenty of water and getting enough rest. Go to pages 16 and 17 for more support.
- 4) If your symptoms get worse and it's difficult to manage at home, call 111 or use the NHS 111 online coronavirus service. You should also use the 111 service if your symptoms haven't improved after a week.

Important

If you or someone you're caring for starts to have severe difficulty breathing, this is a medical emergency and you should call 999.

Treating the symptoms

According to the World Health Organisation:



"To date, there is no specific medicine recommended to prevent or treat the new coronavirus (2019-nCoV). However, those infected with the virus should receive appropriate care to relieve and treat symptoms, and those with severe illness should receive optimized supportive care. Some specific treatments are under investigation, and will be tested through clinical trials."

The best thing you can do is to look after yourself at home and try to relieve your symptoms.

The advice is to treat it as you would a cold:

- Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated
- Take paracetamol for pain relief and to try to control your temperature
- Try to rest as much as you can
- Eat a balanced diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables

Looking after your mental health and wellbeing

If you're feeling ill and self-isolating it's important to keep your spirits up.

Try to keep in touch with friends and family via video call or social media.

If you feel up to it, keep yourself busy with activities like watching a movie, reading or listening to a podcast.

As soon as you feel well enough, it's also important to keep your body active with some light exercise.

Busting the myths

There is currently no evidence that multivitamins or vitabiotics have any effect on COVID-19, over and above keeping you generally healthy.

There have been reports that ibuprofen makes coronavirus worse.

Whilst there's no strong evidence this is the case, the NHS advises you stick to paracetamol unless your doctor has told you it isn't suitable for you.

If you're already taking ibuprofen or another non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID) on the advice of a doctor, you shouldn't stop taking it without checking first.

Monitoring your symptoms

Continue to monitor your COVID-19 symptoms whilst self-isolating.

If your symptoms get worse and it's difficult to manage at home, call 111 or use the NHS 111 online coronavirus service.

You should also use the 111 service if your symptoms haven't improved after a week.

See page 19 for details of what to expect when you contact 111.

If you start to have severe difficulty breathing, seek medical attention quickly by calling 999.

Understanding viral load



Ever wondered why it's important to wash your hands after you blow your nose when you already have a virus? Or why you should isolate yourself from other members of the household when you have COVID-19?

It all comes down to what's called 'viral load'. Viral load sounds very technical, but it's relevant to coronavirus for a number of reasons.

What is viral load?

Viral load describes the amount of the virus in your body. In some illnesses, a high viral load is associated with more severe symptoms.

Even though you've already caught a particular virus, for some illnesses if you keep exposing yourself to it you'll end up with more of the virus in your system: a higher viral load. This in turn could increase the severity of your infection.

Whether this is the case for COVID-19 is still being investigated.

How is viral load measured?

To measure viral load, a sample of plasma or blood will be analysed to evaluate how much of the virus is in a standard volume.

By using a standard volume, doctors can compare viral loads in different patients against one another and assess whether there's a link to how severe their symptoms are.

Why is viral load important for coronavirus?

There are two reasons viral load is significant when it comes to COVID-19: the potential link to more severe symptoms and the infection rate - the speed at which the virus is spreading.

Symptom severity

Though COVID-19 is a new disease, some early reports from China suggest that a higher viral load can lead to more severe symptoms. This is the same for similar illnesses such as flu and SARS.

This is, however, still a grey area and there are conflicting reports about the link between the level of COVID-19 in your body and the severity of your symptoms.

Another study in China of 94 COVID-19 patients showed no difference in their viral load at the end of their illness compared to the beginning. Researchers are continuing to evaluate cases to see if there's a link between high viral load and more severe coronavirus cases.

Infection rate

Beyond the severity of symptoms, viral load is also significant when it comes to the rate at which the disease is spreading.

When it comes to infectious diseases, the initial dose it takes to make someone ill is referred to as the 'infectious dose'.

Looking at how quickly COVID-19 is spreading, medical experts have concluded that it's likely that it only takes a low 'infectious dose' to make someone ill.

This helps explain why the virus is spreading rapidly and why following social distancing guidelines is so important.

How does social distancing help limit viral load?

We encounter bacteria and viruses every day, so why do we need such stringent social distancing measures when it comes to coronavirus?

The early indications show that it only takes a small amount of the virus to become infected.

Going outside and interacting with people who may be carrying the virus but not yet symptomatic increases your risk of becoming ill.

Why do some coronavirus patients end up needing intensive care?

The majority of COVID-19 patients only have mild to moderate symptoms; this means their innate and acquired immune responses have managed to work together to successfully fight the virus.

However, it's expected that around 5% of the UK population will need additional medical support in hospital, with one third of those admitted needing intensive care.

So why do some people develop more severe coronavirus infections?

A slow acquired response

After the initial innate immune response, the second acquired phase kicks in once it has a response that's specific for that virus.

In older people or those with weakened immune systems, this second stage may take longer to kick in, meaning the virus has more time to replicate.

If it's an illness where higher viral load means more severe symptoms, this additional time means that viral load is increased and the person will become more and more unwell.

Medical opinion is currently divided on whether higher viral load does cause more severe symptoms in COVID-19 patients.

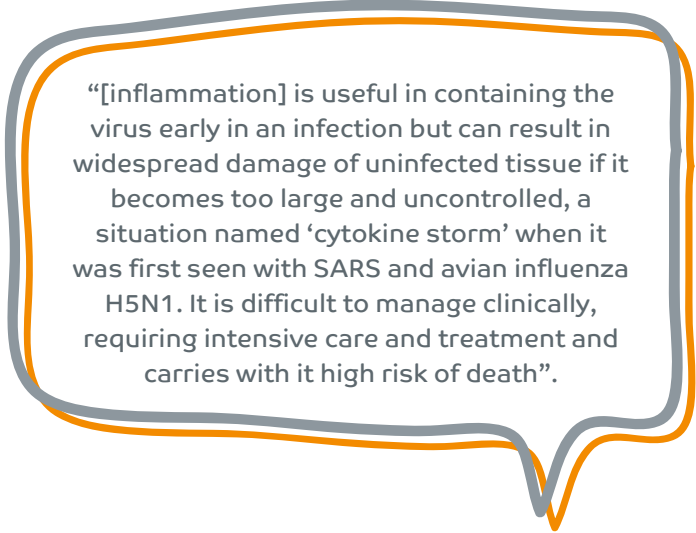
Widespread inflammation

To try and contain the virus, one of the things our initial innate immune response does is to cause inflammation.

Whilst this can be helpful in the short term, inflammation can have a serious impact on other parts of the body if it continues for too long.

As well as providing a virus-specific solution, the acquired immune response is also supposed to tell the innate response to stand down now that a better solution is available. This includes telling it to stop causing inflammation.

According to Dr Michael Skinner, Reader in Virology, Imperial College London:



“[inflammation] is useful in containing the virus early in an infection but can result in widespread damage of uninfected tissue if it becomes too large and uncontrolled, a situation named ‘cytokine storm’ when it was first seen with SARS and avian influenza H5N1. It is difficult to manage clinically, requiring intensive care and treatment and carries with it high risk of death”.

Pre-existing health conditions

Another reason that COVID-19 cases may become more serious is if someone has a pre-existing health condition.

This could be something respiratory related, such as asthma or COPD, or may impact a completely different part of the body, like diabetes.

If someone has other underlying health conditions, this means that the body's systems may already be under a lot of stress.

The added challenge of fighting a virus may cause too much strain and they may need more serious medical help.

By proactively self-isolating, those with existing health conditions reduce their risk of being exposed to the virus and the stress on their body becoming too much.

These vulnerable groups are all more likely to require critical care if they become ill with COVID-19.

If too many people need hospital treatment at the same time, the NHS will be unable to cope.

Taking care not to expose vulnerable people to the virus through shielding should help reduce the overall number of people needing critical care and help the NHS cope during this pandemic.



Did you know...

It's estimated that 5% of the UK population will need hospital treatment for COVID-19, with a third of those patients requiring critical care.

How long to stay at home for



We're all being asked to practise social distancing and stay at home as much as possible, but when you have coronavirus symptoms, social distancing needs to be stepped up to self-isolation.

Self-isolating applies to anyone with symptoms of coronavirus or living in the same house as someone who is displaying symptoms. To recap the main symptoms, take a look at page 5.

How long should isolation last?

How long you need to stay in isolation for depends on whether you live alone and whether you're the first person in the household to develop symptoms.

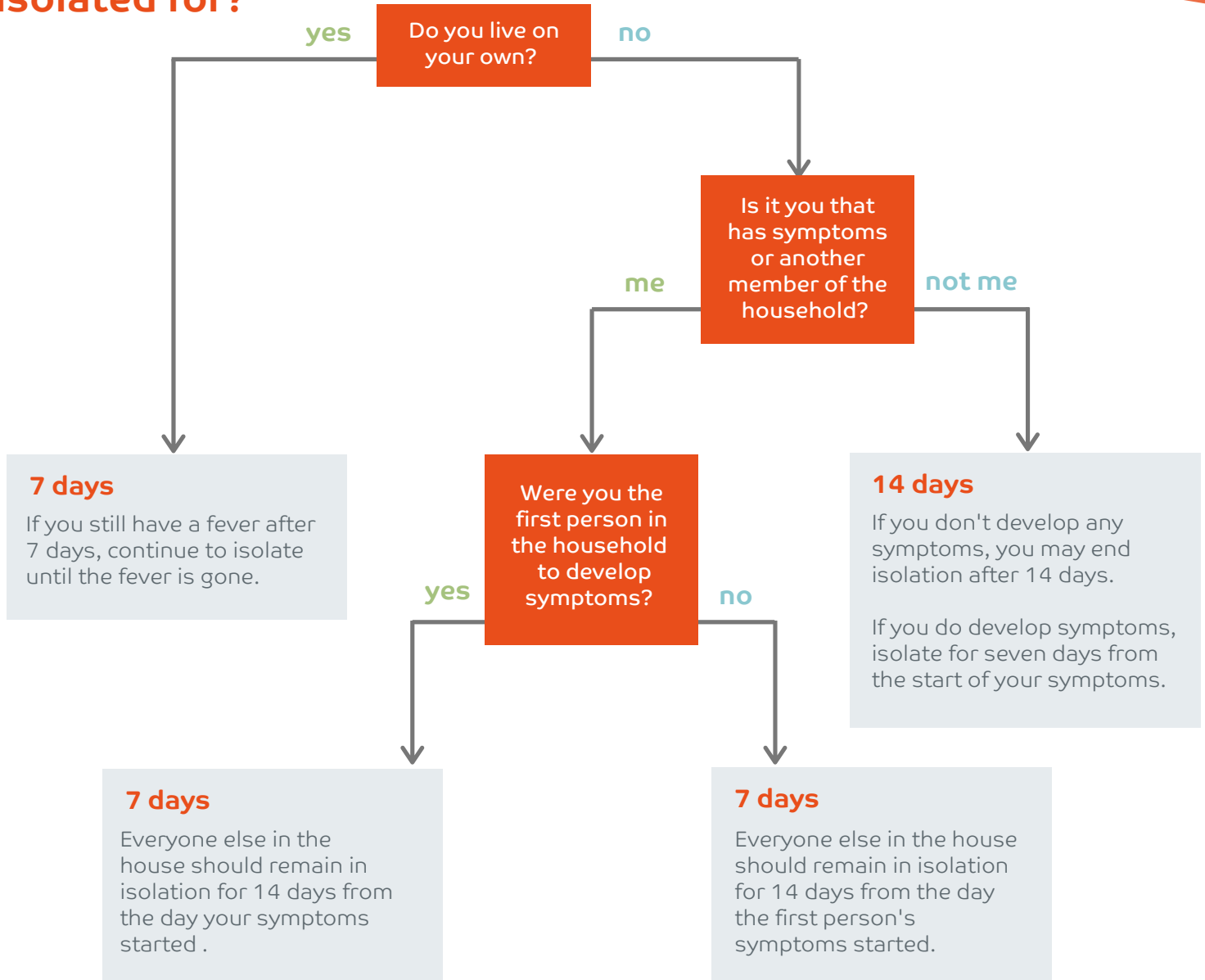
- If you live alone and have symptoms, you should stay at home for 7 days from when your symptoms started.
- If you live with others and you are the first in the household to have symptoms, you must stay at home for 7 days.
- All other household members who remain well must stay at home and not leave the house for 14 days. The 14-day period starts from the day when the first person in the house became ill.
- Anyone else in the household who starts displaying symptoms needs to stay at home for 7 days from when the symptoms appeared. In this case, the 14 day isolation period explained in the point above should be disregarded for that individual.



Did you know...

There's an interactive tool on our website to help you figure out how long you should stay isolated for - [take a look](#).

How long should you stay isolated for?



I feel better!

Double check that you no longer have a fever. If you don't have a temperature, you can stop self-isolating.

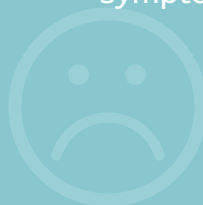
Remember to follow the latest government direction on social distancing.



I don't feel better

If you're not feeling better after a week, you're struggling to manage your symptoms at home or you feel worse, use the 111 service.

This can be done online:
<https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19/>



Promoting recovery



The best thing you can do to help your body fight coronavirus is to make sure you're looking after yourself. This includes eating well, staying hydrated and getting plenty of rest.

How much water should you drink?

The recommended daily water intake for adults is 1.5 to 2 litres, which works out as around 8-10 glasses.

Staying hydrated

Staying hydrated is an important part of looking after your health and wellbeing, especially while you are experiencing coronavirus symptoms and self-isolating at home.

The NHS recommends that you drink plenty of water during the day, enough so that your urine is a clear, pale yellow colour.

It's always important to keep hydrated, even when you are feeling well.

Drinking water keeps the body functioning in a number of ways:

- Regulates your temperature
- Removes waste products from the body
- Aids your digestive system
- Moves oxygen and nutrients around the body

Ways to stay hydrated

Drinking enough water may seem difficult, but there are some easy ways to get into the hydration habit:

- Drink a glass of water when you wake up to replace the fluids your body's used up during the night
- Use a transparent water bottle so you always have water to hand and can instantly see how much you've drank
- Try out a water reminder app so that hydration doesn't slip your mind
- Get creative and make water more appealing by trying out fizzy water, adding a slice of lemon or lime or even using a fruit infuser to create a refreshing drink
- Incorporate water-rich foods into your meals and snacks for an extra boost

Water-rich foods:

- Cucumber – 96% water
- Tomatoes – 95% water
- Green peppers – 93% water
- Spinach – 92% water
- Oranges – 86% water
- Apples – 85% water

The importance of rest

Though it may look like we're not doing anything when we're sleeping or resting, the body uses this time to repair. By ensuring you are getting the right amount of rest, you're giving your brain and body the best chance to recover.

Building rest into your routine

When you are self-isolating with coronavirus symptoms you may feel well enough to continue working from home.

In this case, it is essential that you take the time to build rest and recovery into your daily routine. Working hard without adequate breaks can be a major cause of fatigue and stress. Too much screen time and time spent sitting down isn't good for our overall health.

The following tips can help you make sure that you get enough rest if you are continuing to work:

- Schedule your main breaks during the day in your diary and don't skip lunch
- Plan your work in short bursts of 50 minutes (or 25 minutes) followed by a short break, rather than long sessions of an hour or two
- At the end of every meeting or task, take a five minute break to refresh and refocus the mind
- Know when is your most productive time of the day and use it

Even if you are not working it is still important to make sure that you get enough rest.

Try to find a happy medium between social time when you are keeping in touch with people and finding activities to pass the time and giving yourself plenty of downtime to rest and relax.

Building rest into your routine

Sleep has a huge effect on your body's ability to rest and recover and it is a vital part of our daily routine.

When you're asleep the body appears rested and relaxed, but it's actually doing a lot of physical activity to revitalise and repair.

The recommended amount of sleep for adults is 7-9 hours a night. When you're ill, getting enough time for resting and repairing is crucial for making a speedy recovery.

Try following these top tips to help you relax and get a good night's sleep:

- Stop using electronic devices an hour before bed
- Write down any stresses or worries two hours before bed to reduce worrying at night
- Try meditation and take time to think about positive moments in your day
- Have a warm, decaffeinated drink such as chamomile tea
- Have a long warm bath to prepare for bed
- Listen to calming music to unwind
- Gradually decrease bright lighting, moving from the main light to gentle lamps
- Try breathing exercises to relax your body and mind

What to do if you're not feeling better



For most people the worst symptoms should pass relatively quickly. The government advises you self-isolate for 7 days from the day your symptoms started, so the expectation is most people will start to feel better in about a week or so - initial research has found symptoms tend to last between 8-11 days.

It's important to keep a close eye on your symptoms. The majority of people will only experience mild to moderate symptoms, but some people will require hospital treatment. With this in mind, you need to be aware of whether your symptoms are getting worse so you can contact someone for help.

Important

If you or someone you're caring for starts to have severe difficulty breathing, this is a medical emergency and you should call 999.

Contacting NHS 111

In a small percentage of cases coronavirus can lead to breathing difficulties requiring hospital treatment.

This is usually for older patients and those with underlying health conditions if your fever is very high and you can't take care of yourself.

If your symptoms get worse and it's difficult to manage at home, call 111 or use the NHS 111 online coronavirus service.

You should also use the 111 service if your symptoms haven't improved after a week.

When you contact 111, there'll be a short assessment to understand the severity of your symptoms before advising on next steps.

What to expect when you contact 111

There'll be a short assessment to understand the severity of your symptoms. Questions may include:

- Do you have a fever?
- Do you have a new cough?
- When did symptoms start?
- Are you so breathless that you are unable to speak more than a few words?
- Are you breathing harder or faster than usual when doing nothing at all?
- Are you so ill that you've stopped doing all of your usual daily activities?
- Have you suddenly become confused, or much more confused than normal?
- Has a doctor told you that getting an infection might be very serious?
- Have you had a letter from the NHS advising you to shield (isolate) for the next 12 weeks?

You'll be advised what to do next based on your answers. This may include continued self-care at home or seeing a health professional for further assessment.

