

# **Managing Post-Viral Fatigue after Covid-19**

## What is Post Viral Fatigue?

Post-Viral Fatigue is when you have an extended period of feeling unwell and fatigued following a viral infection such as Covid-19. It is a normal bodily response and is the most common symptom associated with Post-Covid Syndrome (or Long Covid).

### How do I know if it's Post Viral Fatigue and not just normal tiredness?

#### Normal Tiredness

- Activity-induced tiredness
- Occurs after over-exertion
- Can occur as a result of poor sleep
- Usually alleviated by rest and recovery
- Usually short-lived or temporary
- Does not usually limit normal day-to-day activities

#### Post-Viral Fatigue

- Extreme exhaustion and weakness
- Disproportionate to previous activity
- Can occur after minimal effort
- Unresponsive to rest
- Prolonged and fluctuating
- Limits usual activities

### How will Post-Viral Fatigue affect me?

Fatigue is unique to each individual; it is often complex and difficult to measure or define. It can range from being mild to severe; have both mental and physical effects; and be very unpredictable and fluctuating.

#### Physical Symptoms

- Overwhelming tiredness and exhaustion
- Weakness with heaviness in limbs
- Reduced energy levels
- Reduced stamina and exercise tolerance
- Joint/muscle pain
- Nausea/dizziness/headaches
- Sweats/chills
- Palpitations/fast heart rate
- Sore throat/swollen glands
- Flu-like symptoms
- Post Exertional Malaise ("PEM")

#### Psychological Symptoms

- Low mood and reduced motivation
- Anxiety
- Heightened emotions
- Low sex drive
- Reduced confidence
- Feeling useless or hopeless
- Feeling guilty
- Reduced tolerance
- Irritability
- Social withdrawal or isolation

#### Cognitive Symptoms

- Mental Fatigue ("Brain Fog")
- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty thinking or processing new information
- Difficulty with planning and/or problem solving
- Short Term Memory Loss
- Speech problems - slurring of words
- Word finding and conversation difficulties

#### Other Symptoms

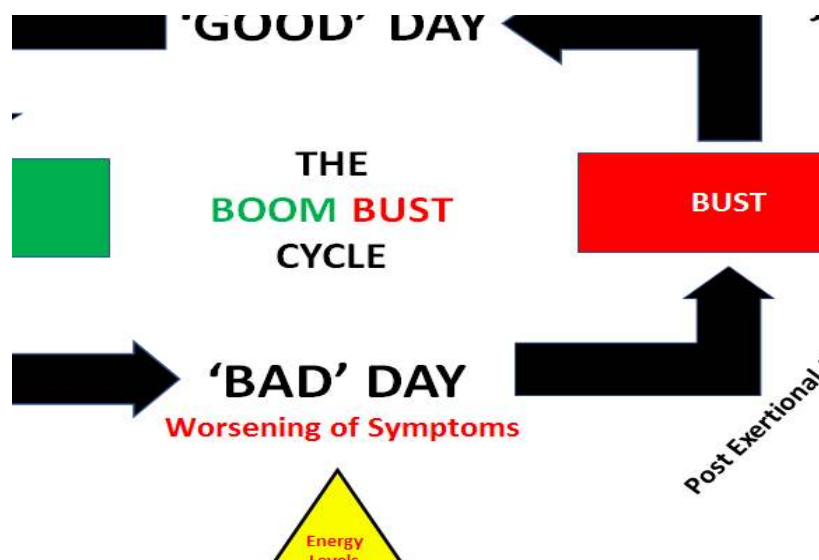
- Disturbed Sleep Pattern
- Reduced appetite
- Burning sensation to skin
- Heightened sensitivity to noise/light/touch
- Heat sensitivity
- Reduced quality of life
- Reduced function and inability to resume previous roles
- Inability to return to work

## How do I manage Post-Viral Fatigue?

At present there is no known cure or treatment for Post Viral Fatigue. There is unfortunately no quick fix and a return to normal health can take time. The best way to manage Post-Viral Fatigue is through awareness, pacing and lifestyle changes. Understanding fatigue and how it affects you will allow you to have better control. In addition, by recognising what exacerbates or triggers your fatigue will allow you to be able to better manage this.

### Awareness

The first step to managing fatigue is being aware of its cycle. Typically, people with Post Viral Fatigue will follow a pattern known as the **BOOM BUST** Cycle.



The BOOM BUST cycle is detrimental to your recovery. As the cycle repeats itself, your overall capacity for activity becomes less, meaning your recovery may take longer. During the BUST phase, you usually experience a period of prolonged rest and inactivity which can lead to deconditioning. Deconditioning can include a reduction in strength, stamina, exercise tolerance, bone density, motor control, flexibility and overall energy production in the body, meaning that daily, routine activities will require increasingly more energy. Recognising your own individual pattern of BOOM BUST can help you to break it.

This is an example of a typical BOOM BUST week:

### Post-Exertional Malaise (“PEM”)

During a BUST phase you may experience what is known as Post-Exertional Malaise (known as PEM) which is a flare-up of symptoms. PEM is the cardinal symptom of fatigue and can be considered an injury or insult to the body, occurring as the result of the body’s inability to recover normally following exertion beyond your current capacity or energy levels.

PEM is a worsening, or flare up, of symptoms, and tends to be delayed. It usually presents itself around 24-48 hours after exertion and will often require several days of recovery (the BUST phase). Usually, the more significant the exertion, or the more severe the energy breach, the longer it will take to recover.

It is important to try to minimise Post Exertional Malaise, as much as possible, as BUST periods often include prolonged periods of inactivity leading to further deconditioning.

The best way to minimise PEM is by attempting to stay within your own individual energy threshold (also known as energy envelope).

### Your Energy Threshold (Energy Envelope)

A healthy person will usually have unlimited daily energy levels, however for a person with post-viral fatigue, energy levels may be significantly less than before.

Your energy threshold (or energy envelope) is the amount of energy you have available to use per day – this will be different for everyone. There are many ways the body uses energy, and different types of exertion will accumulate an energy debt throughout the day which must be paid back. It is therefore important to be mindful of how your body is being taxed and that the threshold for energy utilisation can be much lower for people with fatigue. Management of energy is key in preventing crashes, busts and PEM.

There are several different analogies which can be used to explain what is meant by the term ‘energy envelope’:

#### Money:

*Picture your energy as money! Each day you get a set “allowance” to spend. Any over-spending will put you into debt meaning you will be borrowing from tomorrow.*

#### Fuel:

*Think of a car – it’s engine can only run if the fuel tank has enough petrol in it! When it runs out of petrol it will break down.*

#### Battery Power:

*Think of an iPhone – every time you use an application it’s battery runs a bit a lower. With a brand new iPhone the battery tends to last all day however when it gets a bit older, or it gets damaged, it runs out more quickly and needs to be re-charged more frequently.*

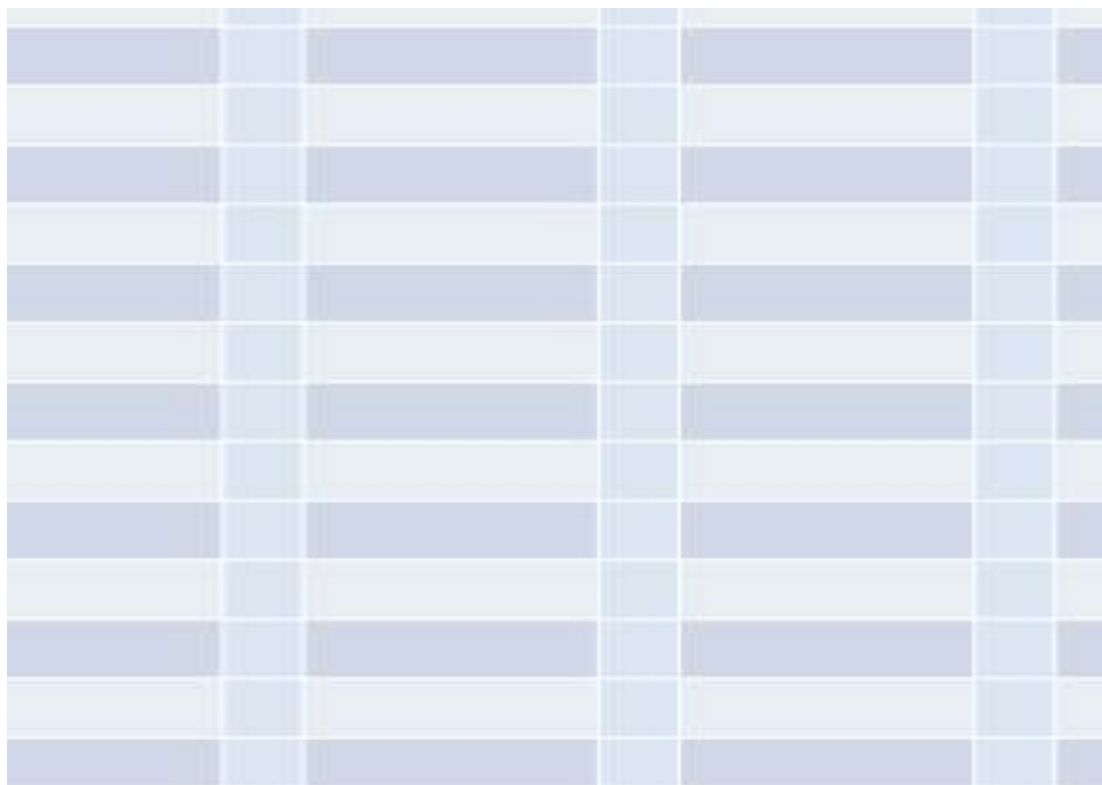
Analogies can be useful for a person with fatigue when thinking about managing daily energy expenditure. Where can you or make savings? How can you keep your tank from becoming empty? What can you do to re-charge your battery?

You can find your own energy threshold or envelope, by using an **Activity Diary**.

## How do I use an Activity Diary?

By using an activity diary, this will be enable you to make a note of everything you do on a daily basis and also make you aware of any patterns and triggers associated with your fatigue and to see how your everyday functioning impacts on your energy usage or levels.

This is an example of an activity diary:



A typical activity diary can be used to record: your sleep pattern; your morning/evening energy levels (out of 10); the different types of activities that you have completed throughout the day; and how fatigued you feel after each one using the Fatigue Scale below:

A response of 0 would indicate that you do not feel at all fatigued after an activity; and a response of 10 would indicate that you feel totally fatigued and exhausted.

It can also be helpful to keep a note of your daily symptoms; alongside your activity diary.

### **Analysing your Diary**

Once you have completed a week's worth of diaries you should be able to notice any BOOM BUST patterns; what constitutes a good day or a bad day; the different type and levels of activity that fill your week; the different type and level of exertion that causes the most fatigue or triggers

PEM; how often you are resting and re-charging; how often you are moving around; how you are sleeping; and how the types of environments that you have been in have contributed to your fatigue.

By recognising how different types and levels of exertion make you feel after completion, it can allow you to identify specific patterns. This allows you to better manage your time and energy and puts YOU in control.

An activity diary is also a useful tool to find your baseline and/or energy envelope.

## Finding your Baseline

Establishing a baseline level of activity is important before introducing any further activity or exercise.

Once you have completed some activity diaries, you should be able to see what your triggers are; look at what changes you can make; and find a level of activity that can be achieved consistently everyday whilst avoiding BOOM BUST and PEM.

When establishing a baseline, it is important to remember that your activity levels may be significantly less than they were pre-Covid. Remember that you are now working with a different post-viral body and there is no limit to the time your body may take to heal. It is likely that you will have good and bad days due to the fluctuating nature of post-viral fatigue, however finding a baseline level of activity that you can achieve consistently, whilst reducing BUST days and minimising your overall Post Exertional Malaise levels, will help in the long term. Once you are aware of your baseline level of activity, it is important not to be attempted to do any extra, even if you are feeling well. Post Viral Fatigue cannot be pushed or worked through.

A good way to manage your daily activities is by finding a mid-point of activity that is achievable on both good and bad days. On bad days you should avoid under-exertion and on good days you should avoid overexertion – all the time ensuring a good balance between activity and rest (PACING) and ensuring a safe level of activity that does not exacerbate your symptoms.

The overall aim is to reduce the BOOMS and BUSTS. Start low and go slow, know when to stop and aim for gradual reconditioning.

## Recognising your Triggers

### Recognising Different Types and Levels of Exertion

Exertion can be defined as anything that stresses or strains the body. The body can be exerted in many different ways, and it is important to look at which type(s) of exertion contribute to you feeling fatigued and experiencing PEM. Identifying these triggers is vital to recovery. Keeping an activity and/or symptom diary can help you to become more aware, however when completing diaries and making a connection between over-exertion and PEM, it is important to note that PEM can be delayed by 24-48 hours.

Some different types of exertion include:

- *Physical Exertion* – physical activity, movement, exercise, respiration, sitting/standing, metabolism
- *Cognitive Exertion* – thinking, communicating, processing

- *Emotional Exertion* – stress, distress, challenging interactions, tragic events
- *Social Exertion* – attending meetings, long conversations, social interactions
- *Sensory Stress* – loud repetitive noises, bright or flashing lights
- *Orthostatic Stress* – upright posture, prolonged standing, standing/sitting with feet on floor
- *Environmental Stress* – proximity to allergens, chemicals, toxins, changes in temperature

In addition to different types of exertion, there are also different levels of exertion – HIGH, MODERATE and LOW. Each activity that you do will use a different amount of energy.

Daily activities don't tend to be carried out in isolation and your day may consist of a combination of tasks which use varying levels of energy. Mixing different types of activity and exertion throughout the day can help to maintain energy levels. Being aware of the types and levels of activity you are completing and how you are exerting your body allows you to become more aware of what you are doing. It is important to look at how you can split up your activities to maintain a balance of different types and levels of activity/exertion throughout the day, and to also recognise when and how to rest and re-charge afterwards.

### Knowing When and How to Rest & Re-Charge

Resting, relaxing and re-charging are an extremely important part of managing fatigue. Good quality rest and relaxation is vital to re-charge your body's energy and healing. Relaxation is also important as it can help to calm your body down when it is stressed which, in turn, supports regulation of your body's autonomic nervous system (the system which controls breathing and heart rate).

You should acknowledge rest and relaxation as part of your daily schedule and plan rest breaks, up to 30 minutes long, in advance where possible. Regular rest should be taken before you become tired and even if you are feeling well – see the 'stopping distance' analogy below.

For some people, resting is simply sitting and watching television or scrolling through their smartphone however, it is important to not just rest the body, but the mind and senses too. The type of rest and re-charge that you need will depend on the area of the body that has been exerted.

Type of Rest	When	Why	Examples
Physical	After physical exertion	To re-charge the body	Sitting, Lying Down, Watching TV, Reading, Power Napping
Mental	After mental exertion	To calm the mind	Deep Breathing, Sitting in Nature, Meditation, Calming Music, Light Exercise, Yoga, Tai Chi
Sensory	After sensory exertion (loud noises, bright lights)	To reduce sensory input	Sitting in a Quiet, Dark Room, Closing your Eyes

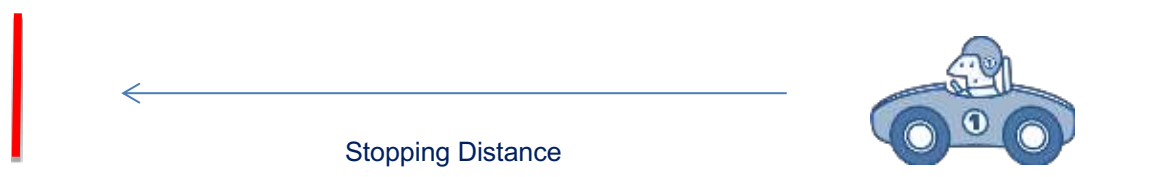
Type of Rest	When	Why	Examples
Emotional	After emotional exertion or stress	To offload and rest your emotions	Journalling, Support Groups, Talking to a Friend, Counselling
Social	After being around others	To re-set	Spending time alone, limiting interactions, saying no and turning down plans
Spiritual	Everyday!	To re-connect with yourself and your beliefs	Prayer, Gratitude, Religion, Community involvement
Creative	When you've not been prioritising self care	To make time for fun	Self-Care, Hobbies, Crafts, Things you Enjoy
Environmental	When you've been in the same environment for a long time	To change your surroundings	Get outdoors, spend time in natural daylight, open the windows and curtains

When managing fatigue, it is important to ensure you are taking frequent re-charge breaks throughout the day in between activities. This is known as PACING.

### Knowing when to **STOP**

It can often be challenging knowing when to STOP! Most people often only stop at the point where they feel they can no longer continue or when they are already experiencing an increase in their symptoms. This means relying on your body to tell you to STOP!

Imagine you are in a car and the car needs to stop to prevent it from hitting a brick wall. You would need to apply the brakes before hitting the wall. With fatigue, you need to stop before you reach the point of over-exertion (the wall), even if you still feel well.



### Managing Activity and Exercise

Whilst activity and exercise are important to regain and maintain muscle strength and endurance; with fatigue, exercise should be safe, balanced, gentle and within your limitations. Vigorous exercise, or anything that triggers PEM, is not recommended!

As the goal of PACING is to minimise PEM, it is important to find a consistent level of activity that is manageable for you, whilst keeping your expectations low. The simple rule is: if you are experiencing PEM then you are doing too much. You cannot push through your fatigue.



Any activity which sends your heart rate above your anaerobic threshold has been shown to trigger PEM therefore you should aim to stay at around 55% of your Maximum Heart Rate (see below) when completing activities or exercise, in order to avoid or reduce PEM.

$$220 - \text{AGE} \times 0.55$$

You should aim for a gradual and flexible return to normal day-to-day activity initially and then only when you feel your fatigue is improving should you try a small amount of light activity followed by REST. The aim is to work on (1) frequency; (2) duration and then (3) intensity. Start low and go slow!

Remember: If you don't overdo it on good days, you will avoid the severity of symptoms on bad days.

## What is PACING?

PACING is an evidence-based technique which has been proven to manage and support recovery from Post-Viral Fatigue.

PACING, in terms of managing fatigue, means finding and maintaining a balanced and achievable pattern of activity and rest in order to break the BOOM BUST cycle and to minimise PEM. It means staying within your energy threshold and slowing down to work at a steadier pace instead of pushing or rushing.

This is the pattern of a typical PACED week:

PACING will enable you to expose your body and mind to daily demands in a regular and controlled way in order to maintain a consistent and realistic daily routine and help the body stabilise itself.

### How do I PACE?

- ✓ Use an activity diary to analyse your day-to-day activities.
- ✓ Find your baseline (usually a mid-point between a good and bad day). Do this same level of activity everyday regardless of good or bad
- ✓ Strip back anything that is not essential. Start LOW to allow for gradual reconditioning.
- ✓ Stay within your energy envelope – know your own tolerance levels and when to stop.
- ✓ Alternate between different types of activity and exertion throughout the day.
- ✓ Aim for a range of high, medium and low energy activities throughout the day.
- ✓ Split up any complex or high energy activities. Avoid multi-tasking or rushing!
- ✓ Ensure regular restoration, relaxation, and re-charge after each activity. Remember to rest your mind and senses, as well as your body. Remember to stop before you become tired!

- ✓ Avoid under exertion or too much rest/sleep - the human body requires activity in order to produce energy
- ✓ Avoid over exertion or vigorous exercise – be mindful of energy drainers and minimise PEM and crashes. Think of over-exertion as an injury to your body - the more severe the injury the harder it will be for your body to recover
- ✓ Conserve energy, as far as possible.
- ✓ Balance enjoyable tasks with not so enjoyable tasks. Prioritise uplifting, inspiring and enjoyable activities that provide you with a sense of achievement; help you connect with what is important to you; and boost your mood.
- ✓ Work through high levels of fatigue very gently with the aim to minimise Post Exertional Malaise. If you continue to develop PEM you may have to continue to decrease your activity until it is no longer induced. Listen to your body.
- ✓ Ensure a period of consistency (at least 7 days) before very slowly and gradually increasing activities and/or exercise. Start low and go slow.

When using PACING; it can also be helpful to look at PLANNING, PRIORITISING AND POSITIONING:

### **Planning:**

Planning is a powerful self-management skill which puts you in control. It allows you to:

- ✓ Plan ahead/pre-plan activities.
- ✓ Schedule in rest breaks.
- ✓ Identify and make time for what is important to you.
- ✓ Minimise the frequency of activities
- ✓ Spread out activities or split them into more manageable stages or chunks. Does the level of activity exceed your current limitations?
- ✓ Think through your activities – can they be done in a different way? Find easier ways to complete activities (short cuts) to conserve energy
- ✓ Schedule more difficult tasks for when you have the most energy. Everyone has a time of day when they are most alert.
- ✓ Alternate between light and heavy tasks
- ✓ Alternate between cognitive and physical tasks
- ✓ Make time for fun – try to do one fun thing every day.

### **Prioritising:**

Prioritising allows you to prioritise, not just what is necessary, but what is important to you.

- ✓ What is a priority for YOU?

- ✓ List your weekly activities in order of importance. Focus on the week ahead only – next week can wait (for now)
- ✓ Apply the 4 Ds to your list: Do? Delay? Delegate? Drop?
- ✓ Identify necessary tasks. Is it necessary? What's the worst that can happen if it's left undone?
- ✓ Eliminate any unnecessary tasks - let go of the things you can't do.
- ✓ Is there anyone else who can help? Can you ask or hire someone to do some of your tasks for you?
- ✓ Can you schedule some time for the things you enjoy every day. What else can wait?
- ✓ How can you save energy for the things you want and need to do? Try to do one thing you enjoy every day.

### **Positioning**

- ✓ Use your environment to support you... lean, sit, perch, rest where possible
- ✓ Avoid pulling, lifting, twisting, bending, stretching and overhead reaching
- ✓ Avoid prolonged standing, squatting or stooping
- ✓ Use gravity and momentum to decrease your workload - push and slide rather than lift
- ✓ Maintain a good posture, where possible
- ✓ Avoid prolonged gripping
- ✓ Bend and use leg muscles when lifting – stand close to objects
- ✓ Avoid lifting children – sit them in your lap instead
- ✓ Use feet to close doors/drawers
- ✓ Bring feet/knees up to put on socks/shoes to avoid over-bending
- ✓ Have work in front of you, not to one side to avoid twisting
- ✓ Don't hold your breath during a task
- ✓ Inhale during the lightest part of an activity and exhale during the most strenuous part
- ✓ Keep your chest and open and relaxed
- ✓ Use breathing techniques such as pursed lip breathing; diaphragmatic breathing and 'Blow as you Go'. Your Physiotherapist can teach you these techniques.

### **Your Environment**

When PACING, it is useful to pay attention to your surroundings and become aware of how certain environments contribute to your fatigue.

- ✓ Reduce clutter – busy environments can contribute to fatigue (and both mental and physical tasks can require more energy when navigating clutter)
- ✓ Ensure adequate room temperature – increased body temperature can increase fatigue. Shivering also uses energy.
- ✓ Ensure adequate ventilation – a supply of cool, fresh air will help with fatigue.
- ✓ Ensure adequate lighting – poorly or brightly lit rooms can strain the eyes and cause sensory overload.
- ✓ Reduce noise/distractions – too much noise, or too many distractions can contribute to sensory/mental fatigue
- ✓ Lack of sunlight/daylight – lack of Vitamin D can cause fatigue; and lack of natural melatonin can affect sleep and contribute to fatigue – open the curtains, get outside, spend time in nature

### Energy Conservation

It is important to look at new and different ways to use and save your energy. This can be achieved by:

- ✓ Making simple adjustments to your daily routines to improve your energy efficiency
- ✓ Saving energy for things that are important to YOU!
- ✓ Minimising unnecessary tasks.
- ✓ Reducing any triggering or energy consuming environmental and physiological stimuli where possible by learning to ‘turn down the volume’.

Stimuli	Triggers	Helpers
Visual/Sight	Bright lights, excessive sunlight, excessive media or screen time.	Eye masks, tinted lenses, visor, light blocking curtains, dimmers
Auditory/Sound	Loud, recurrent, over-stimulating or excessive noise	Earplugs, noise cancelling headphones, white noise.
Tactile/Touch	Tight or closely fitting clothing, aggravating stimuli, excessive physical touch	Loose or easy/front fastening clothing, weighted blankets, sensitive creams and toiletries
Olfactory/Smell	Overpowering or strong odours, scented products (perfumes, candles, detergents)	Low or non-perfumed soaps and toiletries, good ventilation
Cognition	Excessive cognitive demands	Limit reading, speaking, texting, processing, media, screentime.
Physical	Underlying health conditions, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, pain, vigorous exercise, excessive positional pressure	Use pacing.

Stimuli	Triggers	Helpers
		<p>Manage Underlying Health Conditions via GP/specialist.</p> <p>Manage Nausea, Reflux and Heartburn using ginger, peppermint, anti-nausea agents, antacids, Famotidine, Omeprazole, prescription medications (via GP)</p> <p>Manage Diarrhoea and Constipation – probiotics, digestive enzymes, Immodium, stool softeners, prescription medications (via GP)</p> <p>Reduce Body Aches, Nerve Pains and Headaches by using heating pads, foot warmers, ice packs/hats, topical agents, prescription meds (via GP)</p> <p>Support spine and limbs to prevent muscle tightness, soreness and poor circulation, uses hot/cold compresses.</p>
<b>Orthostatic</b>	Standing quickly, prolonged standing	<p>Complete activities in sitting.</p> <p>Stay hydrated, pre-hydrate with electrolytes prior to activity, use rehydration solutions or saline IV, salt food (liberally), use supports when in upright position, use compression clothing (stockings), discuss prescription medications with your GP</p>
<b>Environmental</b>	Exposure to uncomfortable temperatures, allergens, toxins and chemicals, Asthma	<p>Manage temperatures. Avoid excessive or prolonged exposure to allergens, toxins and chemicals. Manage Allergies – low histamine diet, anti-histamines (H1 blockers), Famotidine (H2 blocker), prescription medications, inhalers and nasal sprays (via GP)</p>
<b>Emotional/Social</b>	Overwhelming emotional or social stressors. Both positive	Minimise triggers, avoid emotionally charged

Stimuli	Triggers	Helpers
	and negative emotions utilise energy.	conversations, movies, shows, social media, news.

- ✓ Using Activity Grading (see below).

### Activity Grading

Understanding the different component parts of an activity and how to break an activity down into more achievable steps is a process known as *activity grading*. Learning new ways to complete activities helps you to use your energy more wisely. By using activity grading, this can help you to:

- ✓ Find the easiest way of doing a task so that you have energy left over afterwards.
- ✓ Break down activities into smaller, more achievable stages by adding, reducing or eliminating steps.
- ✓ Change your position regularly and add in regular rest breaks.
- ✓ Learn to use equipment and/or the environment to support you.
- ✓ Seek assistance with activities.
- ✓ Slow down your pace.

Your Occupational Therapist can provide further advice around Energy Conservation and Activity Grading; along with advice on and provision of equipment, aids and adaptations.

## Making Lifestyle Changes

### Sleep

Impaired sleep is common in those who have been medically unwell and those who are experiencing stressful circumstances. Poor sleep habits and sleep deprivation can contribute to and exacerbate both physical and mental fatigue. Managing and promoting restorative sleep is therefore important in managing Post-Viral Fatigue.

- ✓ Getting good quality sleep can help your body to repair and recover. Ensure good sleep hygiene as far as possible – speak to your Occupational Therapist for more details and/or referral to Salford's Sleep Hygiene Programme
- ✓ Aim to keep to your regular day and night-time routines where possible.
- ✓ Aim to spend some time in natural daylight/sunlight during this day. This supports production of melatonin (the sleep hormone).
- ✓ Aim for 8-9 hours' sleep per night.
- ✓ Daytime naps should be limited to 30 minutes maximum. Naps should not be taken after 3pm.
- ✓ Avoid caffeine, alcohol and decongestants; brain activating activities; exercise or high drama and emotions, in the hours leading up to bedtime.
- ✓ Insomnia is common in Long Covid. If this, or any other sleep disturbance is an issue, speak to your GP to address and treat these.
- ✓ Identify and manage the cause behind any external sleep disturbances such as pain and nocturnal toileting.
- ✓ If you struggle with over-thinking and inability to relax; it may be helpful to empty your mind and relax your body before sleeping using relaxation, deep breathing, journaling or meditation techniques. Further Psychological support may also be beneficial.
- ✓ Consider sleep aids, supplements (Melatonin), sedating anti-histamines (Promethazine) and/or prescription medications via your GP.

### Diet

Food is fuel. Nutritional deficiencies can contribute to and exacerbate fatigue.

- ✓ Try to eat a well-balanced, healthy diet, as well as staying hydrated, to give your body the nourishment it needs to return to good health.
- ✓ Both physical and mental fatigue can occur as a result of nutritional deficiencies.
- ✓ Limiting or skipping meals can cause fluctuations in blood sugar/glucose/energy levels.
- ✓ A healthy balanced diet supports optimal immune function



- ✓ Try to keep your BMI within a healthy range – between 18 and 25. Being overweight can contribute to inflammation which stresses the body and rapidly uses up nutrients.
- ✓ A healthy balanced diet should include: **High intake and variety** of plant-based foods such as plant and animal proteins, vegetables, fruits, wholegrains, beans, nuts, seeds and legumes; **Moderate intake** of seafood, lean meats and dairy; and **low intake** of processed or refined foods – high sugar, salt, animal/trans fats, overly processed bread or pasta, junk foods and fast foods.
- ✓ You can take a regular probiotic supplement to support your immune health.

### **Mental Health and Stress:**

Experiencing Post Viral Fatigue and a delayed recovery from Covid can have a profound impact on you, your personal life and roles, your work life and your usual day to day routine. It is natural to feel upset, frustrated and, sometimes guilty, however it is important to continue to look after your mental wellbeing and seek support when required as low mood, anxiety, stress and frustration can all exacerbate fatigue. Being in constant 'survival' or 'fight/flight' mode can be exhausting.

You may find PACING difficult to maintain if you are feeling low or lacking in motivation and this is understood and expected. Bad days are expected; do not worry. The process of PACING can be trial and error even for someone who is fully committed but it can be helpful to remember that even 1% progress per week adds up to 52% over a year! The important thing is to try to do what you can, when you can, as much as you can, in order to regain some degree of control.

It can be helpful to identify any mental health or stress related triggers so that you can reduce or avoid these or seek support to manage them. You should also try where possible, to include social, emotional and mental rest into your daily routine and also use relaxation techniques, coping strategies and even complementary therapies, where possible.

Lastly, it is important to prioritise enjoyment in order to boost your mood and, in turn, your energy levels. You should also try to stay connected to others where possible and avoid isolating yourself. There are several Long Covid support groups available across Salford which you can be linked in with.

**Remember ACE:** to be in a good place you need ACE – Achievement, Enjoyment and Connection.

If you are experiencing stress, anxiety or low mood that is having a profound effect on your life and/or recovery then you should speak to your GP or Therapist who can arrange for further help and support.

## Recovery Tips

- ✓ Complete an activity diary in order to identify your triggers.
- ✓ PACE - start low and go slow. Balance activity with rest.
- ✓ After an activity; aim to re-charge the area that has been exerted. Limit rest breaks and daytime naps to no more than 30 minutes. Avoid under-exertion.
- ✓ Escape the BOOM BUST Cycle. Reduce your triggers and avoid any over-exertion
- ✓ Aim to minimise PEM where possible.
- ✓ To begin with, aim to stay at 55% of your maximum heart rate ( $220 - \text{your age} \times 0.55$ ).
- ✓ Find your baseline and ensure a period of consistency before attempting to increase your activity levels.
- ✓ PLAN – spread out your activities throughout the week; and alternate between different types of exertion. Remember to schedule in rest breaks.
- ✓ PRIORITISE – Get rid of anything unnecessary and ask for help. Try to balance enjoyable tasks with not so enjoyable tasks and make time for what is important and enjoyable to you.
- ✓ Make time for pleasure.
- ✓ Aim to conserve energy where possible.
- ✓ Optimise Sleep, Diet and Mental Health. Stay connected and seek help and support where necessary.
- ✓ Aim to keep activity levels stable for at least 7 days. Once the foundations are in place you can then move into the building phase.
- ✓ Aim to resume your normal daily routine by making small, gradual changes. Increase activity levels by no more than 20% per week. Do not rush your recovery or try to push through your fatigue.
- ✓ Set yourself SMART goals (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely). These can be short or long term goals. What do you want to achieve?
- ✓ Practice self-compassion and give yourself permission to heal.
- ✓ Record and reward your achievements and progress.

## Managing Relapses and Set-Backs

Post Viral Fatigue is fluctuating in nature and recovery therefore can be trial and error. Relapses and crashes, despite pacing and following all of the 'rules', are normal.

Do not beat yourself up if you crash or relapse. Stumbling blocks and set-backs are expected and not every crash or relapse can be timed, explained or understood.

It is important during any relapse or crash to continue with pacing, even on the good days. Manage the factors you can do something about and remember that even small gains add up to improvement (even 1%)

This Relapse Survival Guide has some useful tips:

<https://batemanhornecenter.org/education/mecfs-guidebook/>



### **REMEMBER**

**Recovery varies from person to person and it can take time.**

**It is important to focus on how far you have come; not on who you were pre-Covid.**