

COVID-19 care guide

Here's what to know when healing at home.

If you or someone close to you has been diagnosed with coronavirus (COVID-19) and are now home recovering, you likely have a lot of questions. We're here to offer you all the information and tools you need for a safe and comfortable recovery.

Symptoms

About 80% of people with COVID-19 have mild to moderate symptoms and will recover without needing hospitalization. However, about 1 in 5 people with COVID-19 will experience severe symptoms, and will benefit from management in the hospital. Older adults and people with certain medical illnesses (e.g., heart disease, lung disease, diabetes) may have a higher chance for developing more serious COVID-19 illness.

Symptoms can be different from person to person, including how long they last and how severe they are. Symptoms generally appear anytime between 2 and 14 days (most commonly between 3 and 8 days) after exposure and may take 2 weeks or longer to go away. For all symptoms, remember to hydrate often (8 glasses of water daily or as your doctor recommends) and eat well balanced meals.

COVID-19 symptoms may include:

Breathing difficulty



Chills



Cough



Diarrhea



Fever



Headache



Loss of appetite



Loss of taste or smell



Nausea



Weakness or fatigue



Tracking your symptoms may be helpful to you and/or your doctor in managing your illness. Keep a log and have it available for doctor visits (in person or through phone/video chat).

Symptom	Severity	(Example) 4/28/21	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date
Breathing difficulty	Same	x					
	Worse						
	Better						
	Resolved						
Cough	Same						
	Worse						
	Better	x					
	Resolved						
Diarrhea	Same						
	Worse						
	Better						
	Resolved						
Fever	Same						
	Worse						
	Better						
	Resolved						
Nausea	Same						
	Worse						
	Better						
	Resolved						

Symptoms that require immediate medical attention:

- Trouble breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in your chest
- New confusion or low energy upon waking
- Bluish lips or face
- Difficulty getting fever down
- Oxygen saturation that is below 90%

Call your doctor if you have new or worsening symptoms or questions on managing your symptoms.

Call 911 if you are experiencing a medical emergency.

Monitoring and managing your symptoms

Symptom	Recommendation
Breathing difficulty	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Your breathing should remain comfortable or improve over time. If breathing difficulty is new or worsening, contact your doctor immediately.– Under the mental health section you will find resources for breathing exercises that can help to strengthen and recondition your lungs.– If you are using a pulse oximeter to check your oxygen level, follow the instructions.
Cough	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Drink warm liquids such as tea and broths to help loosen mucus.– Try over-the-counter cough medication and cough drops after speaking with your doctor or pharmacist.– Speak with your doctor about medicines such as inhalers if coughing persists or worsens.– Cover your cough with a tissue or cough into your elbow to prevent spreading the infection.
Diarrhea	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Speak with your doctor about whether taking probiotics (“good bacteria”) may be helpful.– Try a diet that’s easy to digest, also known as a stool bulking diet (bananas, rice, apple sauce and toast).– Avoid dairy.– Eat small, frequent meals.– Speak with your doctor if diarrhea persists.
Fever	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Take your temperature several times a day.– Use acetaminophen (Tylenol) as needed and follow provided instructions. Do not take acetaminophen if you don’t need it.– Avoid using nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medications such as ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil) or naproxen (Aleve) unless recommended by your doctor.
Loss of appetite	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Try small, frequent meals instead of a few large ones.– Avoid greasy and fried foods.– Try to walk around before and after meals.– Stay hydrated. The World Health Organization recommends 1/2 teaspoon salt and 6 level teaspoons sugar dissolved in 1 liter of water to replace electrolytes.
Nausea	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Avoid carbonated drinks such as seltzer water or soda.– Try chamomile tea, water with lemon juice, or ginger (alone or in tea).

Preparation for a medical emergency

It’s a good idea to develop a care plan document that summarizes your health conditions, medications, doctors, emergency contacts and end-of-life care wishes (health care proxy, advance directives).

Complete your care plan with your doctor, and if needed, a family member. Once this is completed, you will feel better prepared in the case of any medical emergency.

Physical activity

COVID-19 may cause you to have weakness or a lack of endurance. Here are some recommendations on maintaining and regaining your strength and physical health.

- Walk as much as you can—it’s great for your body and mind. Wear a mask when in public and practice social distancing.
- Limit lying on your back during the day; sit or stand as much as possible.
- As your symptoms improve, ask your doctor if it’s safe to gradually introduce gentle exercises.
- When starting or re-starting an exercise routine, start slowly and work your way up as tolerated.
- Listen to your body. If you’re feeling unwell, stop the activity and rest. You should discuss these symptoms with your doctor.

Mental health

Your mental well-being, and that of your caregivers, can be affected by your illness. Having a structured daily routine can help. Here’s how:

- Take deep breaths, stretch or meditate regularly.
 - Adequate sleep is important for your recovery. Make sure your bedroom is quiet, relaxing and at a comfortable temperature.
 - Avoid using electronic devices (cell phone, TV, computer, tablets) for 1 hour before bedtime.
 - Avoid napping during the day.
 - Avoid eating large meals, caffeine, and alcohol approximately 3-4 hours before bedtime.
 - Limit the use of sleep medication unless recommended by your doctor because it may have potentially unwanted or harmful side effects.
- Pay attention to what is happening locally, but take frequent breaks from news stories, as they can cause stress and anxiety.
- Make time daily for activities you enjoy.
- Maintain regular communication with friends and family. Others experiencing similar emotions may be helpful.
- Talk with people you trust about your concerns and feelings. Always remember your doctor is only a phone call away.

Additional Resources:

[CDC: Physical Activity Basics](#)

[CDC: How Much Physical Activity Do Older Adults Need?](#)

[Move Your Way](#)

[CDC: Physical Activity Recommendations for Different Age Groups](#)

[HealthinAging.org: 12 Ways To Ease Isolation While You’re Practicing Social Distancing](#)

[CDC: Tips for Better Sleep](#)

[Sleep Education: Healthy Sleep Habits](#)

[CDC: Stress and Coping](#)

[NIH: Meditation in Depth](#)

If you or a loved one is overwhelmed with sadness, depression, or anxiety, or have thoughts of harming yourself or others, call the **Disaster Distress Helpline** at **(800) 985-5990** or text **TalkWithUs to 66746**.

Follow-up care

If you haven't already done so, schedule an appointment with your doctor for follow-up immediately after discharge from the hospital or at the time of your COVID-positive result so he or she can help you manage your illness. Lab services such as blood tests and some imaging can be done in your home if needed. If you have been in the hospital, be sure to read all the discharge instructions.

Frequently asked questions

What safe practices should I follow now that I have been diagnosed with COVID-19?

Stay at home, except when getting medical care, and maintain **at least 6 feet** of distance from others. Cover your mouth and nose with [a mask](#) to decrease the risk of spreading the virus whenever you are with others and regardless of whether you are more than 6 feet apart. Do not handle pets or other animals while you are sick, and use home delivery of groceries, meals and household items if possible.

Stay in isolation until you are cleared by your doctor or you meet the following CDC requirements:

- You have no fever (100.4 degrees F or above) consistently for at least 72 hours without taking any fever reducing medicines (e.g., acetaminophen, aspirin, ibuprofen).
- Your respiratory symptoms are improving.
- **At least 10 days** have passed since your symptoms first appeared.

If you had close contact with any other person, tell them about your diagnosis and to monitor for symptoms.

How do I minimize the risk of infecting household members?

Try to stay in a separate bedroom (with separate bathroom, if possible) away from other people in your household. Do your best to maximize the ventilation in your home by opening windows when possible. Be especially careful around older adults or people with underlying medical conditions.

Sneeze or cough into a tissue or your elbow, away from other people. Throw away used tissues in a lined trash can and wash your hands. Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If unable to wash with soap and water, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol and allow to dry.

You should not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels or bedding with other people or pets in your home. Wash these items thoroughly after use. Use a household cleaner to disinfect all "high touch" surfaces daily (door handles, counters, toilets, computer keyboards/mouse, cell phones). Also, clean surfaces that may be contaminated by bodily fluids (blood, stool, saliva).

What is one of the known complications of COVID-19?

Some people may develop blood clots in their veins as a result of COVID-19. Speak with your doctor and employer before coming out of isolation about ways to prevent this complication (e.g., activity and medications).

Content credit: the physicians and faculty of Northwell Health.