



Pain Management with Long Covid

Long Covid and pain

- Although pain is not currently listed as a Long Covid symptom in medical guidance, many people with Long Covid report pain.
- The causes of this pain are not always clear.
- Pain may be caused by:
 - Breathlessness (chest pain or throat pain)
 - Lower exercise tolerance (joint pain or stiffness)
 - Fatigue (headaches or joint pain)
- You may also have pain or physical discomfort that has no clear cause.



Breathing exercises for pain

Why use breathing exercises for pain?

- Many people find that breathing exercises can help when their pain is bad.
- There are several reasons this might be:
 - Breathing exercises can help you to relax and stay calm
 - Breathing well can increase your oxygen intake
 - Focusing on your breathing can distract you from your pain
 - Breathing exercises can also stop you from holding your breath when you are in pain.

Exercises for pain: candle breathing

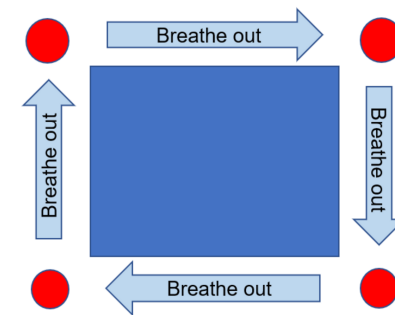
- In this exercise, visualise a lit candle around one foot away from your face.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth. Try to keep your breathing steady, at a level where the candle flame flickers, but does not go out.
- Inhale slowly through your nose.
- Repeat this exercise as long as needed.

Exercises for pain: diaphragmatic breathing

- Sit in a comfortable position.
- Place one hand on your belly, just below your ribs. The other hand may go on your chest, or rest comfortably at your side.
- Take a deep breath in through your nose.
- Try to let the air go into your belly, pushing out your hand. Your chest should not move.
- Breathe out through pursed lips, as though you are whistling. Feel how the hand on your belly goes back down as the air leaves your body.
- Repeat this exercise 3-10 times.

Exercises for pain: square breathing

- Make sure you are in a comfortable position and close your eyes.
- Visualise a square or rectangle in front of you.
- As you breathe in, trace the top edge.
- As you breathe out, follow the line down the side.
- As you breathe in, trace the bottom edge.
- As you breathe out, follow the line up the side.
- Repeat this exercise until you feel better.



● = breathe in

Treating pain



Medication for pain

- Pain medications such as ibuprofen, paracetamol and aspirin may be able to help with pain, but this depends on the cause and type of pain.
- Avoid taking pain medications regularly in the long term, as they can have side effects.
- Talk to your doctor before taking pain medication on a regular basis.
- Always follow the instructions on the packet and never take more than the recommended amount.



Transcutaneous electronic nerve stimulation (TENS)

- TENS is a treatment for pain which uses low-voltage electricity to “reprogramme” your pain response and reduce your pain.
- A TENS unit is a small box with attached electrodes. You put the electrodes on your skin to use the unit.
- TENS can be done at home.
- You should always talk to your doctor before trying TENS.
- TENS is more effective for some people than others. There is no clear way to predict whether it will work for you.

Diet

- Some people find that certain foods affect their pain.
- If you realise that your pain is often worse after eating, consider what foods you eat regularly and whether any of them may be triggering pain.
- There is no one-size-fits-all diet that will treat chronic pain. Trigger foods are very individual.
- Foods which people often find make their pain worse include:
 - Red meat
 - Tomatoes or potatoes
 - Red wine and coffee
 - Blue cheese
 - Chocolate

Acupuncture and acupressure

- There is evidence that acupuncture can help with pain.
- Acupuncture is usually not painful, but if you are afraid of needles, there is also evidence for the use of acupressure, which is something like massage.
- You should only receive acupuncture or acupressure from a trained professional.

Massage and aromatherapy

- Being physically relaxed can reduce your pain.
- Massage and aromatherapy can help you to relax.
- Many people report that their pain is better after getting these treatments.
- Myofascial release massage is reported to be particularly effective.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

- Although chronic pain is not a mental health condition, it can be worse when you are stressed, anxious, or emotionally strained.
- Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is a form of talking therapy where you can be given tools to change your habits and thinking patterns.
- CBT can address your pain directly by offering ways to manage pain.
- CBT can also help you to be less stressed and to address other underlying causes of pain.
- CBT is available on the NHS and during COVID-19, is mostly completed online.

Managing pain



Keeping warm

- Many people find their pain is reduced by warmth.
- Try to find somewhere warm to sit. Wear warm clothes or wrap yourself in a blanket. Electric blankets can also help.
- A hot drink, like tea or hot chocolate, can help with pain and with mental discomfort. Try to avoid coffee.
- Many people find that taking a hot bath can ease pain, especially in joints and muscles.
- A warming pack against the sore place can help. Try not to put hot items directly onto the skin, though – wrap them in a cloth first.

Clothing

- Some sorts of pain may be made worse by wearing tight, scratchy, or stiff clothing.
- Wearing loose clothing made of soft fabric can reduce the risk of pain.
- Some people with hand pain find that gloves are helpful.
- You may find that you experience something called allodynia, where being touched can be painful. If this is the case, try to wear light clothing if possible, to reduce the sensation of your clothes setting off pain.

Making sounds

- There is evidence that screaming, groaning, swearing, or otherwise making noise when you are in pain can help to reduce your pain.
- It is not known why this helps, but you may find that having a sound you make when you are in pain can help to relieve your pain.
- Of course, this is not always appropriate!



Touch and contact

- Touching another person releases endorphins, which can act as a painkiller.
- Some people find that stroking a pet animal can have the same effect.
- If you have **allodynia** or your pain is made worse by being touched, this can be difficult. However, social contact with people you love can have a similar, though lesser, effect.



Distracting yourself from pain

- Having something to focus on besides your pain can help you to manage it.
- When your pain is bad, consider whether there are any activities you can safely do to take your mind off it – reading, watching TV, or talking to a friend.
- Distracting yourself from pain makes it easier to cope and stops you from tensing up, which can make pain worse.

Mindfulness

- Mindfulness is a process of being aware of your body and your surroundings.
- Mindfulness exercises can help you to figure out where your pain is centred and to make it easier to cope with.
- Mindfulness can also help you to relax and to settle your breathing.
- Mindfulness can be hard to start off with, but it will get easier with practice.

Pain resources



Pain Toolkit

- The Pain Toolkit is an NHS-backed booklet which helps to walk you through managing pain.
- It was developed by Pete Moore, who has chronic pain himself.
- Your doctor may be able to supply you with a copy, or you can order one online at www.paintoolkit.org



Online courses and worksheets

- The following websites offer free courses and/or worksheets to guide you through managing your pain.
 - www.painassociation.co.uk
 - www.retrainpain.org
 - www.painconcern.org.uk
 - www.versusarthritis.org

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The following organisations contributed to this presentation

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