

Living Well with a Long-Term Health Condition:

2. Living an Active Lifestyle

Why this leaflet?

This resource is intended for people who are living with, or have recently been diagnosed with, a long-term health condition. Living with a long-term condition can bring challenges when it comes to maintaining an active lifestyle. This leaflet highlights the benefits of remaining active while living with a long-term condition and offers some advice and tips on where to begin. You may need to adapt things slightly to your own health needs. If you have concerns about anything or how to adapt things to your own particular needs, please ask your GP or your health care professional.

The full range of IMPARTS booklets can be found at:

<https://imparts.org/resources-self-help/>

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Getting my life back

When you are living with a long-term health condition it can be difficult to maintain your regular routine, remain active, and be involved in things you enjoy doing. You may be living with a symptom like chronic pain, or you may find that managing your illness is time-consuming and tiring. You may have been forced to give up work or do a different, more manageable job. As a consequence, you may have become less active.

Being active can mean different things to different people; it can mean exercising but it can also include any movement such as cleaning the house or getting outside to go to the supermarket. However, being less active can be unhelpful for your mental health and well-being. You may feel that you are becoming less connected with your family or community, losing your confidence, or feeling like you don't want to do things in the same way you used to. It may seem like the effort of doing something outweighs the enjoyment or benefit you get from doing it. You may begin to feel that everything about you is defined by your health condition, and you have forgotten the 'real you'.

You may find that you have real difficulty engaging in activities that you previously enjoyed. This can creep up very quickly. It can be so difficult to find the motivation and energy to do things if you are feeling low. Over time, you might find you are doing very little. This can lead you to feel even lower. You might also neglect your daily tasks and responsibilities. You may start to feel bad about yourself or overwhelmed by all the things you have to do.

Have a look at the following resource in this series which explains this in a bit more detail:

- [Coping with Low Mood and Depression](#)

The importance of keeping active

When you stop doing the things you used to enjoy, you miss out on experiences that make you happy and feel good. This can make you feel even worse, building a vicious cycle.

One way to feel better is to be more active. Being active can include exercise, but it can include many things in your daily routine, like the housework, the gardening, or walking to a shop. It includes keeping engaged with enjoyable activities and tackling your list of tasks and responsibilities in a realistic and achievable way. It is good to start gradually and build up what you are doing over time, as you would if you were learning a new skill. This way you are more likely to succeed, and it will help you manage your long-term condition.

If you are busier and involved in things, energy often follows. If you do something regularly and build it up over time it will begin to feel easier, more enjoyable, and less of an effort. It is harder to build and maintain energy if you are not doing much.

Activity includes anything that interests you and may be different for each person. It can also include physical exercise which is likely to help your condition as well as your wellbeing. Different types of exercise and activity may suit different conditions.

It is important to engage in physical exercise that is suitable for you, so you should ask the advice of a health care professional to work out what might be best for you. If you can, try to keep up some physical exercise, it does not need to be anything too energetic and try and make it enjoyable.

Take a look at this link to help you think to help you to think about ways to stay active:

- Chartered Society of Physiotherapy – [Keeping Active and Healthy](#)

The benefits of activity

- Research tells us there are lots of benefits to activity.
- It helps you to feel less tired. Logic says that when you are tired, you need rest. However, research shows that when you are feeling low, the opposite is often true. Being less active and sleeping more can make you feel even more lethargic, making you feel more lethargic and tired.
- It can help you think more clearly. Once you get started, you may find that you take a different perspective on challenges. You may even get some enjoyment from the activities you do. Doing activities we enjoy can also distract us, leaves less room for your mind to go over negative things, which will make you feel even worse.
- Keeping active may help both your mood and physical health condition. The symptoms of many long-term conditions can become worse with both stress and depression – our mental and physical health can influence one another. It is important to follow the advice of your health professional and talk to your GP to create an exercise plan.

Have a look at the following resources in this series which explain this in a bit more detail:

- [What is the Mind-Body Link?](#)
- [Coping with Low Mood and Depression](#)

Getting started

It may not be easy to get started. You might be unsure about what type of activity or exercise you want to try. You might have negative thoughts such as “I won’t enjoy doing this,” or “It’s too hard,” or “I’ll probably fail at this too”. You might try to do too much too soon. Things that you usually do not even have to think about doing can seem daunting. This is normal and you are not alone in this experience.

You might find that you fall into the trap of ‘I’ll do this when I feel better’ and have lots of plans to take things up again when your condition settles down. However, this may be harder than it sounds: often, the longer we leave it to start something the less likely we are to start it at all. Try to keep some sort of activity going even if it is challenging at first. It can help to slowly start things up again rather than wait too long because then it just gets harder.

Remember to consult with your health care professional before commencing any new activity, so that they can advise what might be best for you specifically.

Establish a starting point

What am I able to do now and what would I like to do?

Create some stepping stones to achieve what you would like. Start off with easy things that you know you can do.

Create a realistic plan and follow it. Try not to follow your mood as it will probably convince you to not do it. But listen to your body if your symptoms get worse then rest/reset and try something different e.g., less or different activity.

The following resource may help you if you are struggling with negative thoughts or to think of activities:

- Samaritans – [Welcome | Samaritans Self-Help \(selfhelp.samaritans.org\)](https://selfhelp.samaritans.org)

Tips for keeping going

- Pace yourself realistically, taking into account both your physical limitations and how you are feeling. Both of these may vary from day to day, which is okay. Listen to your body because that will help you to understand what you are able to achieve. Your mood will change from day to day too but that is when the plan needs to be in place to be consistent.
- Take things more slowly than you have done in the past, take more breaks, or switch between one task and another, so that you do not spend too long doing one thing.
- Think creatively about how you might do something in a more manageable way, especially if you are struggling. Think about what might get in the way of you doing it, and plan ways round these barriers. Have a look at the leaflet in this series: [‘Problem Solving’](#)
- Break bigger tasks down into small chunks. For example, if you want to sort out a pile of paperwork, you might make a start by spending twenty minutes on it each day. It is often easier to aim to do a task for a set period of time rather than trying to achieve a set amount.
- Speak with your GP or care team about the possibility of commencing exercise as well as activity. This can improve your mood and general health.
- Take time for yourself - make time to relax too.
- Make time for recovery too – listen to your body.
- Try to get a regular sleeping pattern. This really can help improve your mood and energy levels. Have a look at the leaflet in this series: [‘Your Sleep’](#)
- Get support from someone else – why not ask a friend or a family member to do the activity with you?
- Pace yourself. Don’t go mad on the first day and then not do it again.
- Be consistent. Follow the plan, not the mood.
- Make it enjoyable.

King's Patient Advice and Liaison Services (PALS)

This is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. The PALS office is located on the ground floor of the Hambleton Wing, near the main entrance on Bessemer - staff will be happy to direct you.

Their website can be found here: PALS – King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust (kch.nhs.uk/patientsvisitors/help-and-support/pals).

Tel: 020 3299 3601 Fax: 020 3299 3626 Email: kch-tr.pals@nhs.net

Providing feedback

We welcome your feedback on this series of leaflets, please use the QR code or the link below to access a short survey. <https://forms.office.com/e/R86s27qqfa>



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