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Coronavirus (COVID-19) – Important advice for people with chronic pain

This leaflet provides you and your family with information about how Coronavirus/COVID-19 might affect you if you have chronic pain.

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are a new continuous cough and/or a fever/high temperature (37.8C or greater).

A new continuous cough is where you:

- have a new cough that's lasted for an hour
- have had 3 or more episodes of coughing in 24 hours
- are coughing more than usual

A high temperature is feeling hot to the touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature). You may feel warm, cold or shivery. Some people will have more serious symptoms, including difficulty breathing or pneumonia, which might require admission to hospital.

Your safety is our priority and we aim to minimise disruption to hospital services where possible. With that in mind we have listed some important information below. This includes answers to questions you may have and directions to services that can offer advice and support.

Some groups of people are considered to be at extremely high risk of severe illness with COVID-19. You would not be identified within this group for chronic pain unless you have a qualifying underlying condition/s or you are taking therapies/ medications that weaken your immune system. If you are in this group you will receive a letter from NHS Scotland or be contacted by your doctor and should follow shielding measures:

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-shielding>

Where can I call for support?

The NHS Inform Scotland website has up-to-date information and answers to frequently asked questions about COVID-19. <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19>.

And also on Chronic Pain generally

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/brain-nerves-and-spinal-cord/chronic-pain>

For general information and any concerns about Coronavirus / COVID-19 you can call 0800 028 2816 (COVID-19 helpline).

For **other non-emergency health concerns**, your first point of contact should still be your GP or 111. They are likely to assess you over the telephone or via video link rather than in person to reduce the risk of infection from COVID-19.

You should ask family, friends and neighbours to support you and use online services to arrange deliveries of food and medicines where possible.

If this is not possible, then arrangements have been made for:

- those classed in the highest risk group (that have received a letter from NHS Scotland advising them to shield themselves at home with a text service to register for support because they have been identified by their health condition and/or prescription of immune-suppressant therapies <https://www.gov.scot/publications/covid-shielding-contacts/pages/highest-risk-classification/>) or

- those classed at increased risk (if you are over 70 or receive the flu vaccine for medical) to telephone a national assistance helpline **0800 111 4000 Monday to Friday during office hours**.

Please remember this helpline is dedicated to helping those who cannot leave their home and who cannot get help online.

If you receive support from health and social care organisations, such as care support through your local authority, this will continue as normal. Your health or social care provider will be asked to take additional precautions to make sure that you are protected.

Will my treatment change?

The NHS in Scotland is currently dealing with an unprecedented health situation that has meant that some services have had to be postponed to ensure other, seriously ill patients can be treated and cared for. In these circumstances, NHS Boards are expected to reschedule services or advise of alternative arrangements as soon as clinically appropriate.

Your treatment plan is individual to you. You should not change your medication unless told to by your hospital pain service or your GP. There is currently no strong evidence that ibuprofen can make coronavirus (COVID-19) worse. Until there is more known about this, take paracetamol to treat the symptoms of coronavirus unless your GP or another healthcare professional has told you paracetamol is not suitable for you.

If you are already taking ibuprofen or another non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID) on the advice of your GP or another healthcare professional, do not stop taking it without checking with them first.

Should I still go to hospital appointments?

The NHS will minimise the time you spend in hospital departments and it is likely they will contact you to postpone or change your appointment. Where it is possible to do so an alternative may be offered, for example, a telephone or Near Me video consultation. Make sure your care provider has your up-to-date contact details.

If you have the slightest sign of Coronavirus/COVID-19 then do not come to the hospital. Instead you should check your symptoms against the information on NHS Inform <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19> and call 111 to seek further advice.

If hospital admission is likely please remember to pack your mobile phone and phone charger so you can keep in touch with relatives and friends.

Where can I find support to self-manage my chronic pain?

During challenging and uncertain times such as these it can be difficult to keep on track with your self-management strategies, which help you manage your chronic pain condition.

It may be that your pain management appointments, support groups and leisure and community services have been cancelled due to the health and social care service changes as a result of COVID-19.

Many NHS Board pain management services have their own websites that host a variety of patient videos, leaflets, mindfulness audio, tai chi videos and more.

NHS Ayrshire and Arran <https://www.nhsaaa.net/pain-management-service/>

NHS Lanarkshire <https://www.nhslanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk/services/chronic-pain/>

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde <https://www.paindata.org/>

NHS Lothian [https://services.nhsllothian.scot/painmanagement/Pages/Pain-Management-Programme-\(AAH\).aspx](https://services.nhsllothian.scot/painmanagement/Pages/Pain-Management-Programme-(AAH).aspx)

NHS Fife

<https://www.nhsfife.org/nhs/index.cfm?fuseaction=nhs.servicedisplay&p2sid=9503FC99-5056-8C6F-C04C4C5EFF26B37A&themeid=3B984BF2-65BF-00F7-D42941481355468F>

NHS Forth Valley <https://nhsforthvalley.com/health-services/az-of-services/self-management/>

NHS Tayside <https://www.nhstayside.scot.nhs.uk/OurServicesA-Z/PainService/index.htm>

There are also a range of organisations that support people with pain by providing resources to empower individuals to self-manage their long term pain condition.

Pain Concern www.painconcern.org.uk

Offers a range of resources, including an email helpline (help@painconcern.org.uk).

Pain Association <https://painassociation.co.uk/>

Alternatives to face-to-face groups are offered online. Additional resources and free downloads are also available.

Versus Arthritis: <https://www.versusarthritis.org/> - telephone helpline Monday to Friday between 9am-8pm, 0800 5200 520.

The Pain Toolkit: www.paintoolkit.org

Tame the Beast: www.tamethebeast.org

Live Well with Pain: <https://livewellwithpain.co.uk/>

ALISS (A local Information System for Scotland) <https://www.aliss.org/>

Action on Pain: <http://www.action-on-pain.co.uk>

Offer support and advice including a telephone (0345 6031593) and e-mail helpline (painline@action-on-pain.co.uk).

AHP Living well in isolation guidance:

https://ahpscot.wordpress.com/2020/04/04/living-well-in-isolation/amp/?_twitter_impression=true

Scottish National Pain Management Programme: <https://www.snrpmp.scot.nhs.uk/>

British Pain Society: www.britishpainsociety.org/people-with-pain/

What exercises can I do to keep active?

Keeping active is important for health and wellbeing and the management of chronic pain.

You are allowed to leave your home to exercise once a day alone or with members of your household, <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>. You should stay at home if you are shielding (classed at the highest risk of severe illness from Coronavirus/COVID-19) or self-isolating (because you or someone in your household has symptoms of Coronavirus/COVID-19).

A gentle, graded approach when starting exercise is encouraged to build up your confidence and manage your pain whilst exercising.

There are many online resources for different types of exercise, however, walking, doing hobbies and day to day activities are also valuable ways to keep active.

The Physiotherapy Pain Association has created a list of resources, including videos to gently exercise including chair yoga, tai chi, strength and balance.

<https://ppa.csp.org.uk/content/keeping-active>

The NHS website also has a range of instructor led videos including aerobic exercise, strength, yoga and Pilates. [https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio/?fbclid=IwAR0Gzib-](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio/?fbclid=IwAR0Gzib-aPSrmn5iSGwEdmXJV8wSNXrpNWHNOyTSI444I6wIODGEDbQBHac)

[aPSrmn5iSGwEdmXJV8wSNXrpNWHNOyTSI444I6wIODGEDbQBHac](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio/?fbclid=IwAR0Gzib-aPSrmn5iSGwEdmXJV8wSNXrpNWHNOyTSI444I6wIODGEDbQBHac)

NHS Lothian Pain Physiotherapy services also has excellent videos for guided exercises. [https://services.nhsllothian.scot/painmanagement/Pages/Pain-Management-Programme-\(AAH\).aspx](https://services.nhsllothian.scot/painmanagement/Pages/Pain-Management-Programme-(AAH).aspx)

As we are being asked to stay at home for a prolonged period, how can I maintain a positive mental health?

We understand that the situation you may be facing at the moment, due to Coronavirus/COVID-19 and your health condition can increase anxiety.

There are simple things you can do that may help, to stay mentally and physically active during this time, such as:

- Spend time doing things you enjoy – this might include reading, cooking, other indoor hobbies or listening to/watching favourite radio or TV programmes
- Try to maintain a healthy lifestyle including eating healthy, well-balanced meals, having sufficient sleep and exercise
- Drink enough water
- Try to avoid smoking, alcohol and drugs
- Keep your windows open to let in fresh air
- Arrange a space to sit with a nice view, if possible
- Get some natural sunlight if you can or sit on your front step, staying more than 2 metres away from others
- Talking to people you trust can help. Contact your friends or family by telephone, text, video call and social media.

Support in dealing with anxiety around impacts of Coronavirus can also be found at:

<https://breathingspace.scot/>

<https://www.samh.org.uk/>

<https://www.supportinmindscotland.org.uk/>

Tips on how to cope if you are worried about Coronavirus and in isolation can be found at: <https://learn.nes.nhs.scot/28084/coronavirus-covid-19/psychosocial-support-and-wellbeing/tips-on-how-to-cope-if-you-are-worried-about-coronavirus-and-in-isolation>

NHS Inform has further resources to help your mental wellbeing:

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19>
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mental-health-helplines/>

Where else can I find further support to help me with chronic pain?

There are also a wide range of mobile apps that support meditation, mindfulness and movement. These include:

- Headspace: guided meditations, animations, articles and videos (free basic pack) <https://www.headspace.com/>
- Calm: guided meditation, sleep, breathing and relaxation (free trial period) <https://www.calm.com/>
- Breathe: an emotional wellness and meditation app (free trial period) <https://breatheapp.uk/>
- Mindfulness North West: free resources to learn about mindfulness <https://mindfulnessnorthwest.co.uk/>
- My Cuppa Jo: Making sense of pain through science and stories, bridging the gap between patients and health professionals <http://www.mycuppaajo.com/>

What should I do to collect my routine medications?

You should ask family, friends and neighbours to support you and use online services to arrange deliveries where possible.

If this is not possible, then arrangements have been made for:

- those classed in the highest risk group (that have received a letter from NHS Scotland advising them to shield themselves at home with a text service to register for support) or
- those classed at increased risk (if you are over 70 or receive the flu vaccine for medical reasons) to telephone a national assistance helpline **0800 111 4000 Monday to Friday during office hours**. Please remember this helpline is dedicated to helping those who cannot leave their home and who cannot get help online.

If you receive support from health and social care organisations, such as care support through your local authority, this will continue as normal.

Your health or social care provider will be asked to take additional precautions to make sure that you are protected.

What should I do if I am a carer for someone with chronic pain?

If you're caring for someone who's vulnerable, there are some simple steps that you can take to protect them from becoming infected with coronavirus/COVID-19. You should follow advice on good hygiene, such as:

- Wash your hands on arrival and often - use soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze
- Put used tissues in the bin immediately and wash your hands
- Don't visit if you're unwell and make alternative arrangements for their care
- Provide them information on who they should call if they feel unwell (their GP phone number and 111) and how to use NHS inform
- Access advice on creating a contingency plan from Carers UK
- Find out about different sources of support that could be used
- Look after your own well-being and physical health

Are my carers, and/ or friends and family still allowed to visit my home?

You should let your regular visitors know that you are reducing social contacts and they shouldn't visit you during this time, unless they are providing essential care for you. Essential care includes things like help with washing, dressing, or preparing meals.

If you receive regular health or social care from an organisation, either through your local authority or paid for by yourself, inform your care providers that you are reducing social contacts and agree a plan for continuing your care.

If you receive essential care from friends or family members, these carers can continue to visit. Carers will be provided with gloves and facemasks to reduce the risk of passing on infection.

It's also a good idea to speak to your carers about what happens if one of them becomes unwell. If you need help with care but you're not sure who to contact, your local council should be able to help you.

If you need help with care but you're not sure who to contact please visit <https://careinfoscotland.scot/topics/how-to-get-care-services>.