

Shortness of breath and COVID-19

What you need to know

It's very common for people who are recovering from COVID-19 to experience shortness of breath. Shortness of breath can happen for many reasons. Some people may also feel afraid, anxious, or panicked, which can make the shortness of breath worse, causing them to limit their activities.

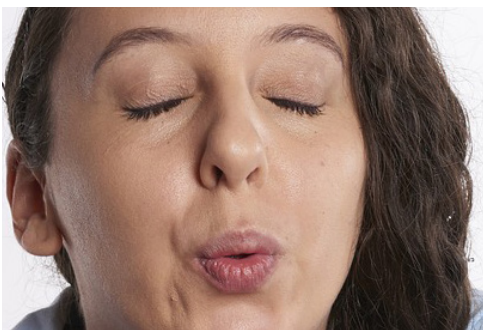
The following self-management techniques can help to improve your shortness of breath.



Positions to relieve shortness of breath

1. When sitting or standing, lean forward with your arms resting on something (when taking a break or as needed);
2. Relax your hands, wrists, shoulders, neck, and jaw as much as possible.

These positions open up the chest, support the arms, and lessen the load on the accessory muscles and diaphragm..



Pursed-lip breathing

1. Slowly inhale through your nose or mouth;
2. Purse your lips like you're blowing out a candle and slowly exhale through your mouth. Empty all the air from your lungs;

Repeat steps 1 and 2 three to five times.

3. Breathe normally for 1 minute.

You can repeat these steps any time you feel short of breath.

Important:

Be kind to yourself. Some days will be better than others.

Your progress may not be steady or predictable. Don't compare today to yesterday, or to how you felt before you got sick, or even to other people. The important thing is to do your best.

To improve your breathing - abdominal breathing

Normally, you should see or feel your stomach rising when you breathe in and dropping when you breathe out. Practising proper breathing techniques can improve your shortness of breath and strengthen your diaphragm, the main muscle involved in breathing.

1. Sit comfortably with your back well supported;
2. Place one hand on your stomach over your belly button and the other hand on your chest;
3. Breathe normally. Do not take deep breaths;
4. The hand on your stomach will rise when you breathe in and fall toward your spine when you breathe out; this means your diaphragm is working properly. The hand on your chest should not move;
5. Relax your shoulders and repeat this exercise for 3 to 4 minutes. Stop if you feel dizzy.

Repeat these steps 3 to 4 times a day.

Even though breathing is mostly unconscious and automatic, it depends on your muscles working properly. Although they may seem like nothing, these exercises can really help with your shortness of breath if you do them regularly.

Feeling short of breath can be very stressful. And the stress can make the symptoms worse. Breathing techniques can be helpful. [Click here for an example.](#)

Reference:

Post COVID-19 Interdisciplinary Clinical Care Network. (2021, 22 mars). *Managing Breathlessness in Post Covid-19 Recovery*. www.phsa.ca/health-info-site/Documents/post_covid-19_Managing_Breathlessness_recovery.pdf

Remember that applying self-management strategies on a regular basis is an effective way of managing shortness of breath.

If you have questions about long COVID, please email us at: readaptation.covid.cisssmo16@ssss.gouv.qc.ca.

Our mission

To maintain, improve, and restore the health and well-being of the Québec population by making accessible an array of integrated and quality health and social services, while contributing to the social and economic development of Québec.

Our vision

Accessible and efficient health care and services that adapt to the needs of Québécois.

Our goals

The CISSS de la Montérégie-Ouest achieves its goals through its innovative approaches and stands apart through:

- its exemplary offer of care and integrated services based on interdisciplinarity, accessibility, and adaptability to the needs of its population;
- its willingness to question and improve its professional, clinical, and administrative practices;
- its appreciation of its personnel and the implementation of human resource management practices;
- its strong relationships with its partners.

Our values

Our actions are guided by five equal and interconnected values: compassion, collaboration, commitment, confidence and consistency.