

# Post Covid-19: How to Take Care of Yourself During Recovery

by Sandie Dennis



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Specialist employee support  
for life's toughest challenges

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# Take Care of Yourself

In the UK alone, hundreds of thousands of people have been infected by the potentially deadly Covid-19, also known as coronavirus.

Now, many of those people are beginning to return to work, and to their pre-Covid lives.

While this is heartening news, there are warnings that many coronavirus sufferers must be especially conscious of their recovery.



(In this, I include our Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who seemed to come out of ICU, straight back to work).

I write about this from personal experience. I once returned from an illness much too soon, then spent the following years witnessing the devastating after-effects of my decision.





## A Personal 'Recovery' Story

Nearly twenty years ago, I suffered several sequential losses and trauma.

I had a successful career at the time, so I remained working throughout, telling myself that I needed the sense of routine this brought.

Several months later, I suddenly started experiencing 'flu-like' symptoms; muscle ache, brain fog, and complete exhaustion.

My GP identified these symptoms as depression, or some kind of "breakdown". But somehow, I knew this wasn't the case. Anti-depressants made no difference whatsoever, and after six months with no respite I was fired from my job, whilst on sick leave with a mystery 'virus'.

Then came genuine depression!

I continued along this frustrating, terrifying path for a long time, until a specialist (Dr Paul Sherwood, an amazing doctor) finally diagnosed me with M.E./chronic fatigue syndrome.

How?

A blood test revealed that I had once unknowingly contracted the Epstein Barr virus, an illness that can remain dormant for many years. Dr. Sherwood then pinpointed the emotional trauma I had been through, and how stubbornly continuing to work through it all had contributed to my illness.

It was payback time.

The Epstein Barr virus had remained in my cells, and after such a devastating succession of losses and trauma, it had unexpectedly returned in the new form of M.E./chronic fatigue syndrome.



## This is a cautionary tale for Covid-19 recoveries.

News has recently been released from health experts, that those who are recovering from Covid-19 could also suffer from long-term health repercussions. They have cited 'post-viral fatigue syndrome', which is a condition very similar to the chronic fatigue syndrome I experienced.

The Telegraph recently reported that, "some patients will experience chronic fatigue syndrome for months, or even years after an initial infection."

In other words, we could be about to begin an entirely new, more long-lasting global pandemic.

## What Symptoms Should I Look Out For?

If you are worried about developing a secondary illness, here are some common symptoms to be aware of.

(Note that these can vary from day to day, or even from hour to hour, and they range from mild to severe):

- flu-like symptoms
- extreme fatigue
- muscle or joint pain
- headaches
- sore throat or sore glands
- problems thinking, remembering, and concentrating
- fast or irregular heartbeat
- feeling dizzy or sick
- sleep issues, and unrefreshing sleep when you do drift off

When I experienced these symptoms, it became impossible for me to work. Simple tasks could wipe me out for days, and if I tried to exercise in any way, I would only feel worse.

Back in the present day, I have been gauging my brother in law's recovery. He developed coronavirus three weeks into lockdown, and so took the mandatory 'two weeks off'.

He is extremely fit and healthy, but he has since experienced crippling exhaustion.

Little was known about my own illness twenty years ago, and sympathy was in short supply. It took me around seven years to 'recover' from those initial symptoms, followed by long, frustrating, anxious periods of self-discovery.

Happily, after many personal 'trial and error' attempts to find a cure, I made a near-complete recovery.





# How to Look After Yourself, As You Recover From Covid-19

The following tips are those I wish I'd been given myself, twenty years ago.

I want to share all the things I've learned from my experience, so you can prepare and protect yourself, and perhaps understand why you're not able to jump straight back into your usual routines of life and work.

## Sleep

Sleep is so crucial for me, that I've written an entire eBook about its importance. Read it ([here](#)) for some personal recommendations on how to get a good night's slumber.

Recovering from Covid-19 means you will need to sleep more. In fact, this will be paramount for a full recovery.

So, don't feel guilty if you have to cut calls or online chats short, as the wave will hit you like a truck (a saying I've used for years!) – and you need to take good care of yourself.

## Food

It doesn't matter whether or not you are hungry, you must push yourself to eat regularly.

My brother-in-law found eating difficult, and lost a stone in two weeks – he was slim already! But it is so important to keep on feeding the healthy bacteria in your gut and microbiome.

If you'd like to know more, I have written a helpful eBook on the subject ([link here](#)).



## Supplements

I'm a huge believer in taking daily supplements, and swear by B Vitamins and Vitamin D. Particularly when we realise that lockdown means most of us aren't getting out enough, and that some of us are sleeping for longer, or more often than usual.

Again, I have written about the importance of food and vitamins in my eBook, in which I have also included a 20% discount for the supplement brand I recommend ([link eBook here](#)).

## Gentle exercise

If you're used to going to the gym or pounding the streets, that will have to be gradually built back up again, as you factor in plenty of rest and recovery time.

As you regain your former strength, it may be that simply cleaning a section of your home every few days is enough.

When you do build up your exercise routine, it's best to start with some gentle yoga or Pilates, and perhaps some short walks.





## Self-care

Over time, I have learnt to give myself a little self-compassion, and do things that I enjoy.

These include joining online classes, reading books, listening to playlists I've created, or just taking a lovely long bath!

## Wellbeing

Prioritise taking each day at a time, and just live in the moment.

(Personally, this stops me from catastrophising, as I know that if I start going 'down the rabbit hole', I am clearly not living in the present moment!)

I also like to show gratitude for the small things in my life. You could do this too, by creating a gratitude board, and adding Post-Its of all the things that you value.



## Being social

Recovery can be very isolating, so it's important to stay connected.

Don't worry, you don't have to have long phone calls all the time – in fact, that could have an adverse effect. Instead, use a combination of calls, voice notes, and messaging apps to stay in contact with your friends and loved ones.

## Acceptance

Understand that you are recovering from a potentially deadly pandemic, which is no picnic!

You deserve your full recovery time.

Remember that trying to avoid it means the symptoms could come back ten-fold later on, so be honest with yourself and others about how you are feeling each day, and how your energy levels are.

## Pacing

My biggest lesson came from learning how to pace myself.

Start by purposefully scheduling your day, so that you have just a few small areas to complete rather than lots of different commitments, one after the other. Recovery also taught me that I needed to say "no" more often!

At first, I found pacing myself difficult to do, and several attempts created 'crashes'. However, through all of that I eventually learned to lower my personal expectations, and set new limits for myself.

## There Is Life After Coronavirus

When you recover (which you will) and look back on this time in your life, you will thank yourself for having taken good care of your recovery; practising self-kindness, saying "no" more often, pacing your activities and commitments better, and understanding your personal wellbeing.



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