



Winning the COVID-19 battle

Welcome to PhysioBiz, with healthcare advice and information you can trust and rely on, brought to you by the South African Society of Physiotherapy!

By now, most of us know of someone who has had COVID-19 – if we've not had it ourselves or in our immediate circle. Someone at work, someone at school, someone at church, perhaps.

As our understanding of and experience with this virus evolves, it's becoming clear that it's not just a case of being sick for a few weeks and then you're fine. Around ten to twenty percent of people who fall sick, who have symptoms, will take longer to recover. That could be anywhere from four weeks to – well, how long is a piece of string? One of the 'Long-haul' support groups has a member who was sick in January and still has not recovered.

What does this mean?

The top five symptoms found in a recently published survey were:

- Fatigue - 100%
- Muscle or body aches - 66.8%
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing - 65.1%
- Difficulty concentrating or focusing - 59.0%
- Inability to exercise or be active - 58.5%

There are over 90 other possible symptoms, including some crazy stuff like racing hearts, dizziness, night sweats and tingling or pain in the hands and feet.

If you or anyone you know is struggling to recover from a bout of COVID-19, please know that you are not alone, and you're not going nuts! There are many support

groups on line which can help enormously with support and tips for coping, as well as the affirmation that comes with seeing how many other people are in the same boat.

But in addition, please do contact your physiotherapist. You need to understand what is happening to you and how you should manage it so you don't inadvertently delay recovery, or make things worse.

For example, one of our Johannesburg physiotherapists tells of a patient who was released from hospital. A week or so later, she had a long-standing physiotherapy appointment. "She called to let us know she'd arrived and was in the car-park," says the physio. "Ten minutes went by and she still had not walked in, so our receptionist got worried and called her." It had taken her ten full minutes to get from her car to the lift on the ground floor, leaning on car boots and walls to help herself along. She was breathless and exhausted, but she was pushing herself because she thought she should be able to do this – she HAD to be able to do this. No pain, no gain, right?

The physio was able to counsel her to take it easy – pushing too hard could have a negative impact on her recovery – and talked the patient through how to ease into activity, what symptoms meant and when to worry, and some practical stuff to help her get through the day, as well as referring her to an appropriate medical practitioner.

Through their skills and experience with rehabilitation, physiotherapists are able to assist with breathing exercises to help the lungs recover, advice and appropriate limited exercise that is within your capacity, to keep your limbs fluid and moving, counsel on managing pain and other symptoms like dizziness. Because they are first-line practitioners, they are trained to assess your condition, treat what they can, and refer you to the right health-care discipline for issues like post-traumatic stress (very common in people after COVID-19) or other things like impacts on organs, hair or the skin.

Your physiotherapist's goal is to get you back to the best possible function and quality of life, and she or he will take the time you need and do what it takes to ensure that happens!

To find a physiotherapist, go to www.saphysio.co.za.