

Dear NARPO members,

First of all, a big thank you for the very kind messages of support that Laura and I have received whilst recovering from Covid 19.

Hugh Colley contacted me last week and asked if I would do a follow up on our recovery for the summer newsletter.

Why this virus affects some worse than others is not understood. One thing is certain, it has spread fear and anxiety amongst all of us.

I spent 8 days at home and 14 days in hospital fighting Covid 19. I was 12 stone 10 lbs. going into hospital and 11 stone 5 lbs. coming out. As I ate every scrap of food they gave me, it just shows the energy required by the human body to overcome this virus.

I left Glangwili hospital on the 30th of April. Before being discharged I had to pass a simple assessment; walk along a short corridor, up a small flight of stairs and still have a saturated oxygen level above 90%. I have never been so determined to pass a fitness test. I can assure you, on that day, it was far more challenging than any PSU fitness assessment I've ever done.

I was warned how difficult things might be, but to be honest, once I got out of that hospital bed I was totally shocked at how weak and fatigued I was. I was advised to keep a diary which I have done every day, and now that I look back, I can see the progress.

During the first few weeks I was unable to stand in the shower or wash without assistance from my wife. Anything physical required more oxygen and sparked off another long coughing bout. I had a stool inside the shower and one outside to conserve energy.

Once I was washed and dressed, I would have to lay on the bed until I had the energy to walk to the lounge. My only walking was back and fore through the house with a stop halfway to recover.

Whilst I was able to sit out on the back patio within a couple of days, it wasn't until the end of the third week that I started to walk across the lawn, a distance of about 30 metres. I have recorded in my diary "walked across back lawn x 6 and sparked coughing, so had to sit down"

As the weeks went on, I would include this walking in my daily strength building. I set a timer on my phone and did 10 mins, slowly increasing as the weeks went by to 25 mins. I also progressed from using the resistance bands that the physio gave me, to lifting some light dumbbells to try and recover some upper body strength.

At about week 6, the very forceful coughing bouts seemed to stop overnight. This was marvelous, but unfortunately as my lower back muscles had been aggravated by the coughing, I developed sciatica which was an added, very painful and debilitating problem.

I have now been home for 9 weeks. I still get breathless on exertion but it is greatly improved. What I'm lacking now is stamina and I still get quite fatigued. My wife Laura's main longer-term symptoms were fatigue and an impaired sense of smell. Where she found the energy to look after me is a testament to her strength and fitness. She returned to work a month ago and now feels ready to return to her running, which is something she has done for many years.

The British Lung foundation suggest that it takes 3-6 months to recover from pneumonia. If that happens for me and I can return to full fitness, I will be happy.

I think in addition to the usual health advice, the best tips I can give for anyone who may have to deal with Covid 19 is:

1. Follow the health advice on '111 on-line' and seek help early if you are concerned. If it hadn't been for Laura, I would have been a typical bloke and left it another few days - which may have been too late.
2. Make sure you have a thermometer in the house to monitor your temperature.
3. Purchase a pulse oximeter to measure your oxygen saturation levels. This is a small device that fits on the end of your finger and tells you if you have sufficient oxygen in your blood. This reading will be helpful to monitor your condition and to help a health care professional assess you over the phone. When I arrived at hospital, my oxygen saturation level was 84%, significantly lower than the normal level of 95-100%.
4. If you live alone, make sure someone telephones regularly; the fatigue is so great you may not have the strength to ask for help.



Once again, thank you for all the messages of support. We hope you and your loved ones stay safe and Covid 19 is something that disappears into history.

Best wishes

Derek & Laura Edwards