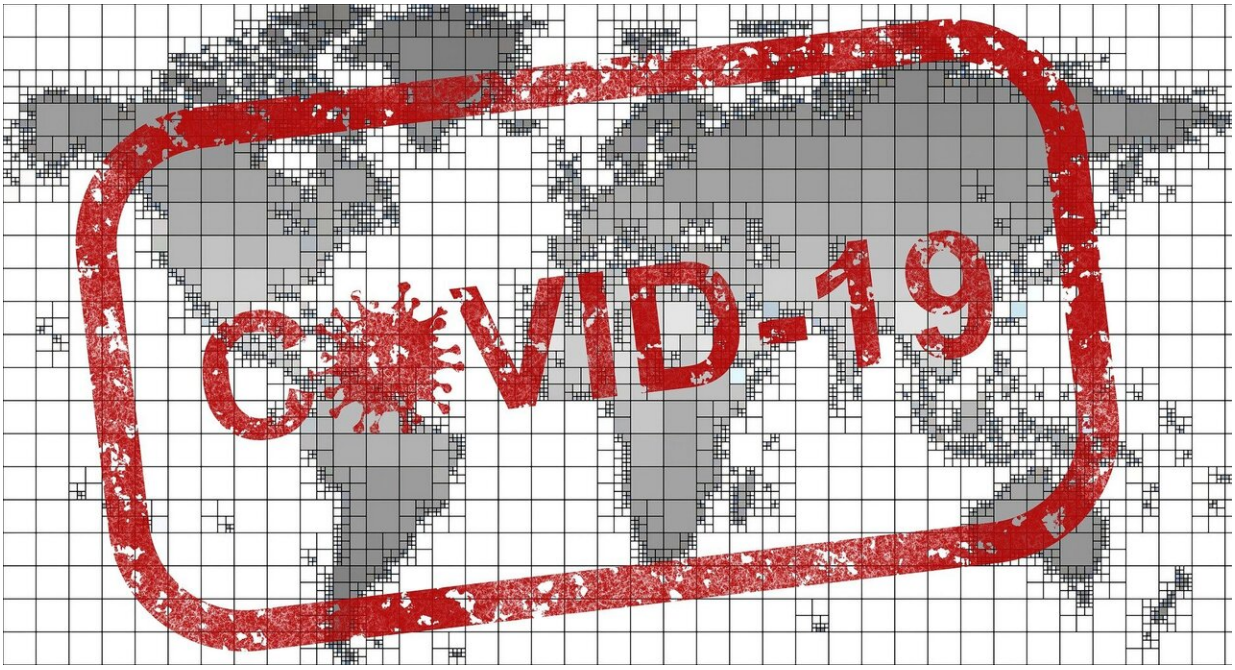
# How rehabilitation could help people with COVID-19 recover—evidence reviewed

February 24 2021




Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Progressive exercise and early mobilisation are among the elements of rehabilitation programmes that may improve recovery for people who are hospitalised with severe COVID-19, new research has concluded.

A team at the University of Exeter led a review of all the available evidence on whether rehabilitation benefitted patients who were

admitted to intensive or critical care with respiratory illness, as information on people with COVID-19 was not available when the research began.

The study, published in *Physiotherapy* and supported by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Applied Research Collaboration South West Peninsula, found that progressive exercise and getting people mobile early may both help people recover from severe respiratory illness, and those findings could be applied to COVID-19 care. They also found that rehabilitation programmes with a number of different components could be beneficial.

Study lead Vicki Goodwin MBE, Associate Professor of Ageing and Rehabilitation at the University of Exeter Medical School, said: "COVID-19 can have a devastating impact on people's lives, long after they leave hospital. We urgently need to find the best ways to support people to regain their health, both in hospital and when they return home. Our research found that getting people moving early on is a key component that can help shape rehabilitation programmes, to get people back on their feet as swiftly as possible".

The rapid systematic review included 24 systematic reviews, 11 randomised control trials and eight qualitative studies, which interviewed patients about their rehabilitation, to explore their views and experience. From these interviews, the team found that rehabilitation can give hope and confidence to patients, although approaches need to be tailored to the individual.

One rehabilitation programme after hospital discharge from intensive care was found to give people a boost and a different outlook for the future. One patient said: "I just feel full of life. I can't wait for tomorrow, you know . . . Before it was just day after day, but now it's- I'm looking forward to tomorrow."

In another study, the recognition of setting goals to achieve small steps as an important part of recovery. A patient reported: "Well, I was shocked at how little I could do, but now, it's the other way, I'm actually shocked at how much I can do and I am doing. It's really good."

The paper is entitled "Rehabilitation to enable recovery from COVID-19: a rapid systematic review."

**More information:** Victoria A. Goodwin et al, Rehabilitation to enable recovery from COVID-19: a rapid systematic review, *Physiotherapy* (2021). DOI: 10.1016/j.physio.2021.01.007

Provided by University of Exeter