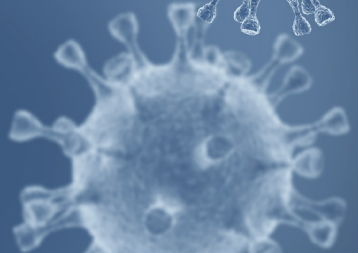
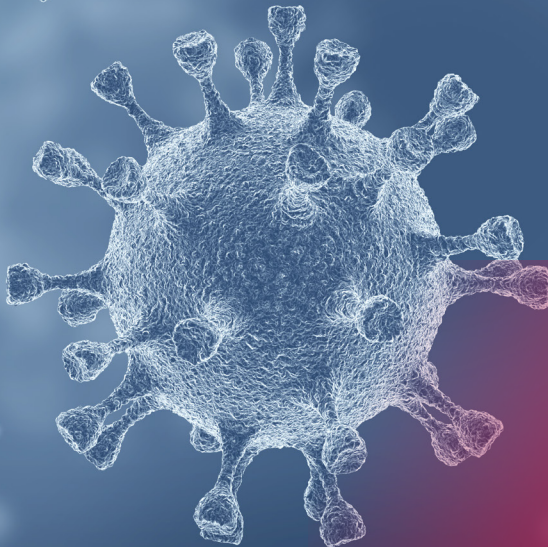
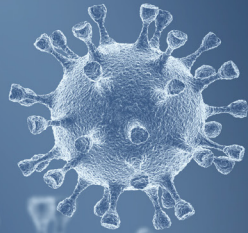
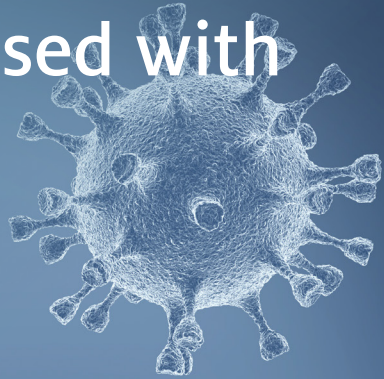


# Being hospitalised with COVID-19

information leaflet patients



Dear patient,

You have been admitted to UZA because you tested positive for COVID-19 and you need the necessary medical care. In this brochure, you will find further information about the virus and what your treatment will entail. If you have any questions, feel free to ask your doctor or nurse. Details on how to contact them are listed at the back of this brochure.

We wish you a speedy recovery.

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Surf to [www.uza.be/covid-19](http://www.uza.be/covid-19) for additional information to this brochure, for you as well as for your loved ones. What if you do not have access to the Internet? Then you can request extra brochures from our healthcare staff.

# 1. What is COVID-19?

## Coronaviruses

Coronaviruses are a family of viruses that cause an infection in humans and animals that can range from the common cold to serious illnesses such as MERS-CoV en SARS-CoV.

Some animal coronaviruses are a zoonotic, which means that they can be transmitted between animals and humans. To date, there are seven coronaviruses that have been proven to also cause infections in humans.

## COVID-19

In late December 2019, the Chinese health authorities identified an epidemic of a new type of coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), which causes the disease COVID-19.

The outbreak first emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan, the capital of the Hubei province. It was initially thought that the outbreak was linked to the South China Seafood City food market, which would indicate that the virus probably came from an animal host. The virus is transmissible from human to human and has since spread to other countries.

## 2. What are the symptoms?

The symptoms vary from mild to severe respiratory problems, accompanied by fever, coughing and difficulty breathing. There can also sometimes be digestive complaints and there may be a loss of smell and taste, something that is quite typical for this viral illness.

Certain segments of the population are considered as 'high-risk groups': they are more susceptible to developing severe symptoms. This mainly concerns people over the age of 65 and people suffering from serious chronic disease.

## 3. How does COVID-19 spread?

The coronavirus spreads from human to human via small droplets that are released mainly by coughing and sneezing. Through these droplets the virus gets released into the air and onto objects and surfaces. Anyone who inhales these droplets or gets them in their mouth, nose or eyes via their hands, can become infected with the virus.

You can reduce the risk of contamination by keeping a distance of more than one meter from sick patients, touching your face as little as possible and practising good hand hygiene.

## 4. How is COVID-19 detected?

When a patient is suspected of being infected with COVID-19, a throat culture and nasopharyngeal swabs are taken and sent to the lab.

## 5. How is COVID-19 treated?

At the moment, there is no specific medication available for the coronavirus. However, there have been experiments with various medicines, but their effects still need to be scientifically confirmed.

The current approach to treatment is therefore mainly geared towards reducing symptoms. For example, for patients with difficulty breathing, we can administer extra oxygen and symptoms such as pain and fever can be reduced with paracetamol. The doctor will always discuss your treatment plan with you.

## 6. How can I keep my loved ones informed?

You will be kept in isolation and will not be allowed to receive visitors. Fortunately, there are other ways to keep in touch with your family, partner, friends... You can stay in contact via WhatsApp, FaceTime, Skype... or call them on the telephone that is available in your room.

If you wish, our healthcare staff can also keep one individual contact of your choice regularly informed. The doctor will then call him or her every 2 days, or when there are important updates. In order to avoid overburdening our healthcare staff with telephone calls as they go about their work of caring for you, we ask your loved ones not to contact us themselves.

Are you worried about how your loved ones, family, children, grandchildren... are handling your hospitalisation? On [www.uza.be/covid-19](http://www.uza.be/covid-19) we have compiled extensive info that could be helpful to them as well.

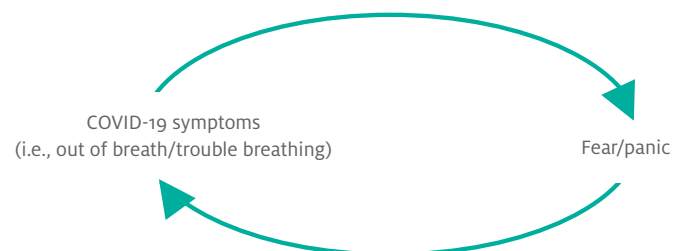
## 7. How can I stay physically and mentally fit?

We understand that your hospitalisation will have an impact on you, both physically and mentally. In order to provide you with extra support in finding a way to deal with this, we offer a number of tips below on keeping yourself feeling healthy, stable and vital.

### Physical effects

One of the symptoms of the coronavirus is shortness of breath. But shortness of breath can also be an effect of the fear and stress that you experience due to your infection or hospitalisation. When your body is under stress, your breathing accelerates, your heart rate increases and/or your muscles become tense.

Anxiety and stress can thus reinforce or maintain your existing shortness of breath caused by the coronavirus. If you are afraid of getting sicker, you will tend to focus more on your inner feelings and become more alert to the signs of illness. That, in turn, can also amplify or maintain anxiety and tension. It is a vicious circle, as shown below. We are here to help you break that cycle.



### Emotional effects

It is normal to experience stress and anxiety when you are hospitalised. It is also logical for these feelings to suddenly become overwhelming. These are actually normal responses to an abnormal situation. So these are absolutely no reason to panic.

If you find that these emotions persist and get in the way of your day-to-day functioning, then we recommend contacting a counsellor. You can ask the caregivers who visit your room about this.

They can put you in touch with:

1. a psychologist you can speak to by telephone.
2. a volunteer, if you would feel better with a light-hearted conversation. You can also contact a volunteer yourself via 03/821.20.46 (chatline).

Would you rather deal with your emotions yourself? On [www.uza.be/mentaalwelzijn](http://www.uza.be/mentaalwelzijn) you will find tips on how to handle them.

### Thinking and worrying

When a new, unexpected event occurs, you are bound to give it some thought. That is quite normal. But when your thoughts have a negative character, you get stuck in a groove and can't seem to shake them, they become brooding thoughts.

Worrying becomes problematic when you are no longer able to relax as a result. On [www.uza.be/mentaalwelzijn](http://www.uza.be/mentaalwelzijn) you will find tips on how to help yourself to worry less.

## How can I deal with these effects?

In addition to a talk with a psychologist or a volunteer, you can also address your stress and emotions on your own. Here are a number of tips for maintaining a healthy, stable and vital frame of mind and what you can do to promote this:

- Remember that it is a good thing that you came to the hospital. You're helping others by getting yourself treated.
- Are there certain things you know to make you feel calm? Then definitely use these: reading, listening to music, drawing, listening to podcasts, sudoku, crossword puzzles, ...
- Physical exercise is an essential step in your healing process. As soon as you have been given permission, you can get started. Your doctor or physical therapist will provide you with an exercise plan specifically developed for people with a COVID-19 infection. If you carefully follow the instructions and don't push yourself beyond your limits, you will be optimally encouraging recovery.
- Your daily routine gives meaning and structure to get through your day. Planning out or scheduling daily activities can help combat boredom and keep your mind off your worries. As much as possible, you should also stick to your regular mealtimes and bedtime and, if permitted, the timing of your exercise. This provides a framework for your day.
- Schedule enough time to rest. Your body is (or has been) seriously ill and needs to recover. When you're ready, your doctor will give you the brochure on fatigue ('Recovering mentally after COVID-19'), which offers tips on how to recover effectively and in a healthy manner.
- Is your shortness of breath worsening or are you feeling very restless? By relaxing your body, you can shift your attention. Relaxation can help you to do so (see [www.uza.be/relaxatie](http://www.uza.be/relaxatie)).
- Are you feeling anxious or under a lot of stress? Try to limit the amount of time you spend watching the news and only use reliable sources.
- Try to avoid corona-related information just before going to sleep, so that you can relax. Avoiding the onslaught of information late at night can have a positive effect on your anxiety, stress and sleeping difficulties.
- Do you notice that certain thoughts keep returning? It can help to write them down and limit the amount of time you spend focusing on them.
- This Apple method can be a useful tool:
  - **Acknowledge:** When you're feeling uncertain, worried or scared, acknowledge it to yourself.
  - **Pause:** Don't immediately react, but press the mental pause button and practice some deep breathing.
  - **Pull back:** Tell yourself that it is your anxiety-brain talking, and that your thoughts are merely thoughts. Do not blindly trust what your anxiety-brain is saying. Your thoughts are not facts.
  - **Let go:** Let go of your thoughts or feelings. They shall pass, you do not have to engage with them. You can picture them floating by, on a leaf in the stream or on a cloud.
  - **Explore:** Explore the present moment. Focus on what is going well. Look around and notice what you can see or hear at this very moment in the here and now. Then shift your attention back to something else, like an activity, rest, exercise or whatever you were doing before you started worrying. A relaxation exercise can also help to be in the present moment.

You don't have to do everything by yourself. Asking for help can make just as much sense. Here are some ways in which others can help you:

- It's okay to have feelings and emotions. Make room for them and discuss your worries and fears with your nurse, doctor, family or friends. Don't hesitate to ask to talk to a psychologist through the healthcare workers who visit your room. Would you prefer having just a pleasant conversation? Then ask caregivers to put you in touch with a volunteer.
- Stay connected. Use your telephone to stay in touch with your family and friends via phone calls, text messages, WhatsApp, FaceTime or Skype. Try to arrange this with your family and friends at regular times. Those moments will give you structure and something to look forward to.

Not everything has to revolve around corona or your hospitalisation all the time. It's okay to talk with your family and friends or volunteers about other things as well. After all, there's no better remedy for stress than a bit of humour. So why not include a little laughter in all of your (telephone) conversations.

## 8. When can I go home?

You will remain hospitalised at UZA for as long as your doctor deems it necessary. After you have been taken off oxygen, we will ask you to get enough exercise in your room so that we can assess the degree of oxygen deficit after exertion.

## 9. I can go home: what now?

### Hygiene guidelines

After your discharge from hospital, you may need to remain in isolation at home for some time. In order to prevent the virus from spreading to others, we ask that you and your loved ones follow a few hygiene guidelines during this period. You will find these in the leaflet 'Hygiene guidelines for (those living with) a COVID-19 patient in isolation at home'.

The duration of these measures will be discussed with your doctor, but they should be continued at minimum until you no longer have a fever and your other symptoms are on the mend.

### Mental recovery

It is normal that after your hospitalisation you may suffer from fatigue and/or difficulty sleeping, memory and concentration problems, nightmares and flashbacks, rapid and/or intense emotional reactions, stress, anxiety and feelings of depression. As you recover, these symptoms will gradually subside. The right exercises and mindset can help. In the brochure 'Mental recovery after COVID-19' we provide you with tips for a speedy recovery and regaining your energy level. You can also surf to [www.uza.be/mentaalwelzijn](http://www.uza.be/mentaalwelzijn) for tips on dealing with fear, stress, anxiety and feelings of depression, as well as relaxation exercises.

### Keep moving

Exercise is an essential part of your healing process. You can get started as soon as you receive the go-ahead. Your doctor or physical therapist will provide you with an exercise plan specifically developed for people with a COVID-19 infection. If you follow the instructions carefully and don't push yourself beyond your limits, you will be contributing optimally to your recovery.

## Short of breath? Contact your GP.

Do you notice that after discharge from the hospital, you are once again feeling increasingly short of breath or are experiencing other symptoms? Then you should contact your GP.



# Contact

After reading this brochure, do you still have questions? Please don't hesitate to let us know. Are you still hospitalised at UZA? Feel free to ask a member of our health-care staff. If you have questions after going home from the hospital, you can contact us on the number +32 3 821 20 10.

# Notes and questions

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*This brochure contains general information and is intended as a supplement to your communication with your caregiver.*

UZA / Drie Eikenstraat 655 / 2650 Edegem  
Tel +32 3 821 30 00 / [www.uza.be](http://www.uza.be)  
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UZA has been awarded the JCI-label for safe and high-quality patient care.

