

A summary of We Are Undefeatable's Insight pack: Health conditions and physical activity; the impact of covid-19

June 2020

Long term health conditions and the impact of Covid-19

Pre-Covid-19

Before Covid-19, the activity levels of people with long term health conditions (LTHCs) was increasing, however people with a LTHC are still twice as likely to be 'inactive' compared to somebody without a long-term health condition.

Covid-19 has exacerbated inequalities

The response to Covid-19 has had a disproportionate effect on people with LTHC and has exacerbated existing inequalities. People with LTHC have:

- Been at higher risk and have experienced higher mortality rates
- Been advised to 'shield' themselves
- Been less likely to leave their home for any reason
- Been more likely to have experienced digital exclusion
- Experienced heightened fear and anxiety
- (those with a mental health diagnosis) been more likely to identify Covid-19 as causing them stress compared to people without a condition

Summary: Covid-19, and associated lockdown restrictions, have affected people with LTHCs differently to people without a health condition. As lockdown restrictions have eased, people with LTHCs have remained significantly less likely to be physically active compared to people without a LTHC. This suggests that there are ongoing challenges for many people with LTHC in being active.

What you can do: home exercise offers an opportunity to manage the symptoms of conditions, however this is unfamiliar and daunting for some. People may be unsure what content is safe and suitable, where to find it, and how to do it.

People with LTHCs and physical activity during lockdown restrictions

Covid-19 has dramatically affected the physical activity levels of people with LTHCs, with 4 in 10 -people with LTHCs stating to have done less physical activity than before. Covid -19 is one of the most frequently cited barrier to moving more.

There are also significant differences in the behaviours and attitudes of people with LTHC and those without. People with LTHC are less likely than people without a condition to agree that they:

- Feel they have the ability to be active
- Have more time for physical activity
- Use exercise to manage physical and mental health
- Feel guilty about both wanting, and not wanting, to exercise. Feeling guilty about not exercising has increased in people with LTHC over the course of the pandemic

People with long term health conditions are less likely to have found new ways to be active and feel a sense of loss and concern about how to replace existing exercise. Often it is the community element and support that is missed.

Summary: People with LTHCs may be struggling to adapt to the current circumstances and many are missing the community support they had prior to Covid-19. Some may also be finding it hard to build physical activity into their 'new normal', in a way that's right for them and suitable for their condition.

What you can do: Make moving feel more achievable by encouraging people to build activity into their routine in small, simple ways. Make it easy for people to find appropriate physical activity opportunities by categorising your online classes by ability level.

Feelings towards lockdown easing

The majority of people with long term conditions are not comfortable returning to mixing with other people and spending time outside their house beyond essential journeys, compared to those without a health condition.

Many are fearful for their own lives, and feel confused, worried and concerned about mixing with other people.

People feel they have sacrificed a huge amount and don't want to undo their hard work.

Summary: People with LTHCs are worried about leaving their homes, even as lockdown restrictions ease it will take time for people with LTHCs to return to pre-Covid-19 routines.

What you can do: Consider how you can improve and expand your range of choices for people to safely be active in their own homes. Online physical activity resources are one way to do this but it is important to also factor in non-digital alternatives to reach and support more people.

Summary of key learning. How you can support people with LTHC in the current context:

- Offer **practical** and accessible solutions
- Offer a range of activities or suggestions to cater for a **range of abilities**. People can find what's right for them
- Any engagement should be **realistically positive**, not too upbeat
- Emphasise the significance of **routine** building with a focus on mental health and wellbeing
- Emphasise the importance of **being safe** whilst being active
- Find ways to support more people by including **non-digital engagement methods**
- Use the **community** angle – from a practical and emotional perspective.

You can access the full Insight pack by registering as a supporter of We Are Undefeatable [here](#).