

The impact of COVID on physical activity levels for those with health conditions

A review of national and local insight

September 2020

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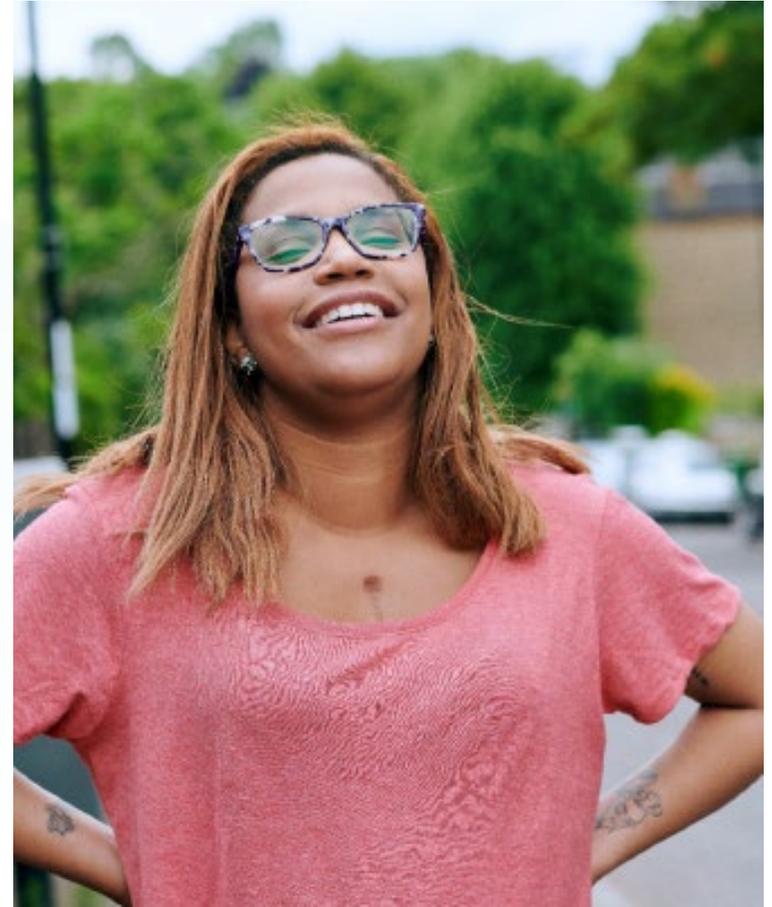
- The national picture: Sport England insight
- The local picture: Active Norfolk's Long-Term Condition Survey update (July 2020)
- Key insights around feelings and motivations
- Links to resources and further information

National Insight

Before COVID-19, the unpredictability of living with health conditions made it hard to find ways to be and stay active.

Research by Sport England shows the pandemic has created additional and significant challenges for those living with Long Term Health Conditions (LTHCs).

The following slides highlight the summary insight findings from Sport England's research into how the pandemic has affected people's activity levels and attitudes towards exercise.



National Insight

1

During the height of the pandemic and lockdown restrictions, around 4 in 10 people with LTHCs were reporting doing less physical activity than normal

2

Around a quarter of people with LTHCs have not been doing 30 mins of physical activity on any day over the course of a week

3

Attitudes around capability, opportunity, and motivation to do physical activity have remained significantly lower for people with LTHCs compared to people without a health condition

4

People with LTHCs have been less likely to find new ways to be active, and less likely to think they've had more time to be active compared to people without a health condition

5

Worry about COVID-19 is now one of the most frequently cited barriers to physical activity for people with LTHCs, alongside the top condition-related issues. Levels of stress, anxiety, and fear are heightened amongst people with LTHCs

6

The majority of people with LTHCs are worried about leaving their homes, even with the loosening of restrictions. There is fear amongst people with LTHCs about the easing of lockdown, alongside feelings of confusion, worry, and concern

7

People with LTHCs want tangible, accessible solutions to support them. In addressing the current challenges there needs to be a greater emphasis on safety, routine building, mental health, and community care

8

We Are Undefeatable is felt to be even more relevant, important, and powerful to people with LTHCs in the current context

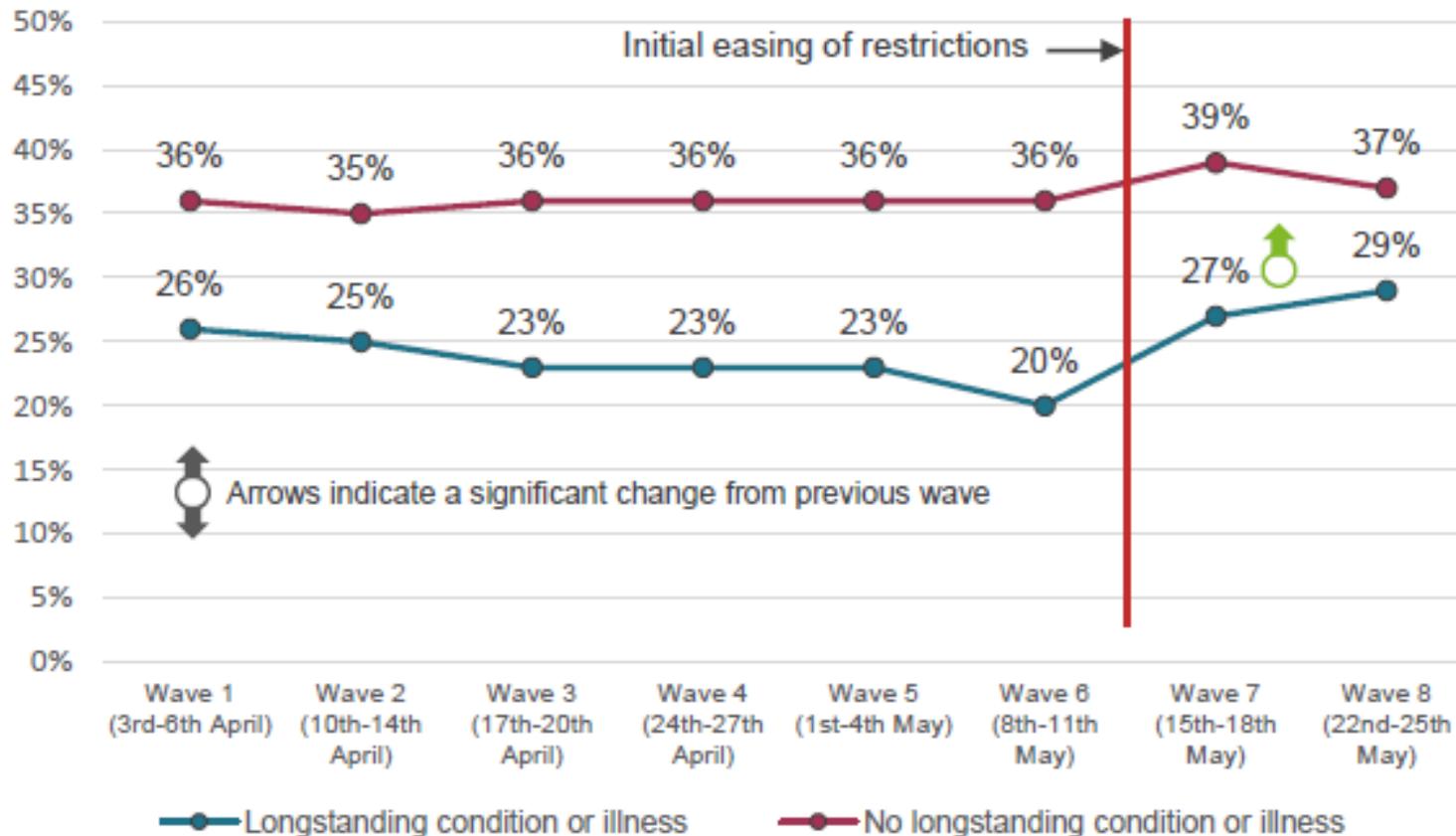
Lockdown Implications

The outbreak of COVID-19 and the measures introduced to tackle it have affected people with LTHCs in a range of different, and sometimes disproportionate, ways:

- 1 **Been at higher risk and experienced higher mortality rates linked to COVID-19**
- 2 **Been advised to take extra steps to 'shield' and protect themselves from coming into contact with the virus**
- 3 **Been less likely to have left their home for any reason compared to the general population**
- 4 **Been at greater risk of experiencing digital exclusion – particularly those in older age groups – compared to other groups**
- 5 **Been experiencing emotional ups and down and be prone to heightened fear and anxiety**
- 6 **(Those with a mental health diagnosis)
Been more likely to identify COVID-19 as causing them stress compared to people without a condition**
- 7 **Seen COVID-19 as a major barrier to being more active (even more so for those in lower socioeconomic groups)**
- 8 **Wanted knowledge about which activities are safe and suitable for their specific condition(s)**

At Easing of Lockdown

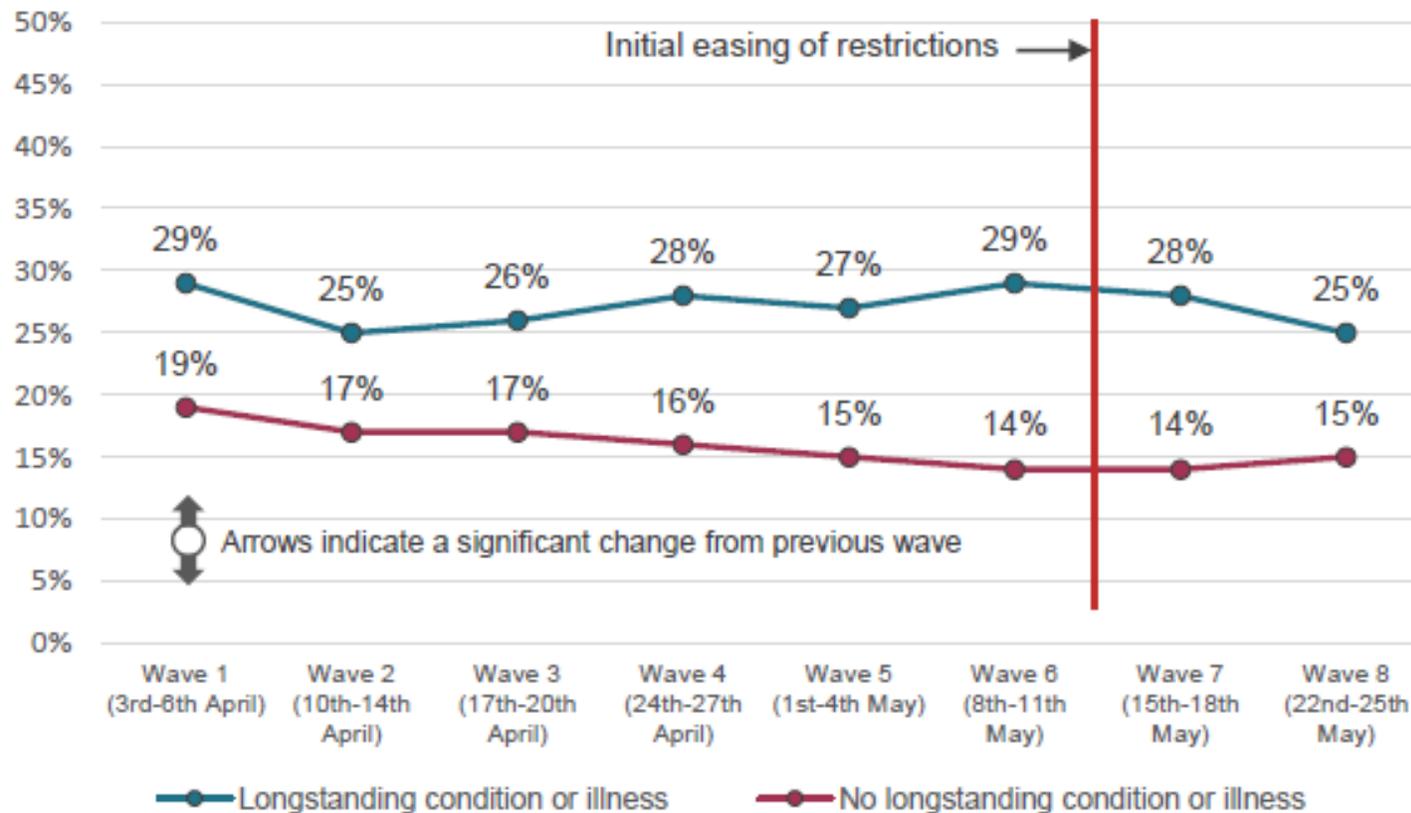
% of adults doing at least 30 minutes of physical activity on 5 days or more over the last week



Following the initial easing of lockdown restrictions on 13th May 2020, there was a significant increase in the number of people with a LTCH who were this physically active over the course of a week.

At Easing of Lockdown

% of adults not doing at least 30 minutes of physical activity on any day over the last week

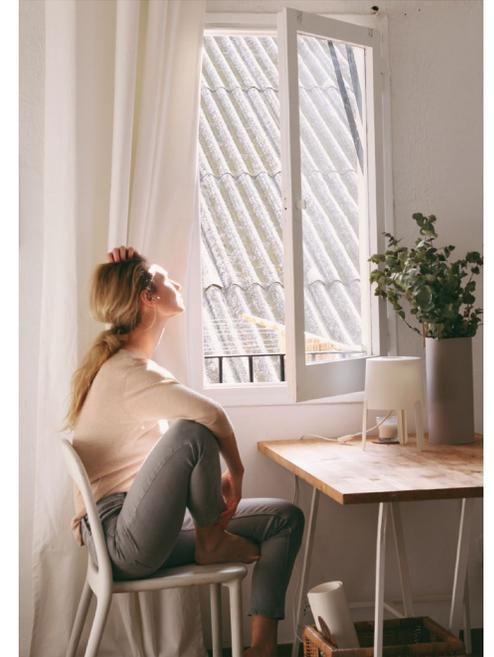


However even after lockdown was eased, there has been a consistent proportion of people with LTHCs who, over the course of a week, have not been doing 30 mins of physical activity on any day.

This suggests that there continues to be greater ongoing challenges facing many people with LTHCs in being active.

Research Highlights

- The proportion of those with a LTHC who have not been doing 30 mins of activity on any day has not changed significantly. This suggests **levels of inactivity for those with LTHCs have not been positively affected by the easing of lockdown**
- **52% of those living with LTHCs are still concerned about leaving their house to exercise**, compared to 43% of adults without condition. And that figure rises to 57% for those with poor mental health
- Since April, **people with LTHCs have reported an increase in perceived opportunities** to be active. However, this doesn't appear to be sufficient to increase activity levels, as other attitudes to being active have not changed significantly since the easing of restrictions
- Levels of stress / anxiety / fear are heightened amongst those with LTHCs, and many have used exercise to manage their mental (62%) and physical health (63%) during the outbreak
- Half of those surveyed haven't found new ways to be active



Research Highlights

- **COVID-19 became one of the top rated barriers to physical activity**, adding to pre-existing barriers related to health conditions, motivation/other commitments, confidence, and access
- Those with a **lung condition** or **mental health condition** were more likely than others to cite COVID-19 as a barrier preventing them from doing more physical activity
- People with LTHCs (27%) are significantly more likely to rank health and well-being charities in the top 5 places they would look for trusted information compared to people without a health condition (22%). This rises to 32% for those people with a mental condition or illness

Across the COVID-19 outbreak, people with LTHCs are less likely than those without a health condition to:

- Have found new ways to be active
- Have more time for physical activity
- Be using exercise as a way to manage their physical and mental health

Active Norfolk Survey Update

In July 2020, we re-surveyed respondents from the 2019 survey, to gain insight into the impact of COVID on the activity levels of people with LTHCs in Norfolk.

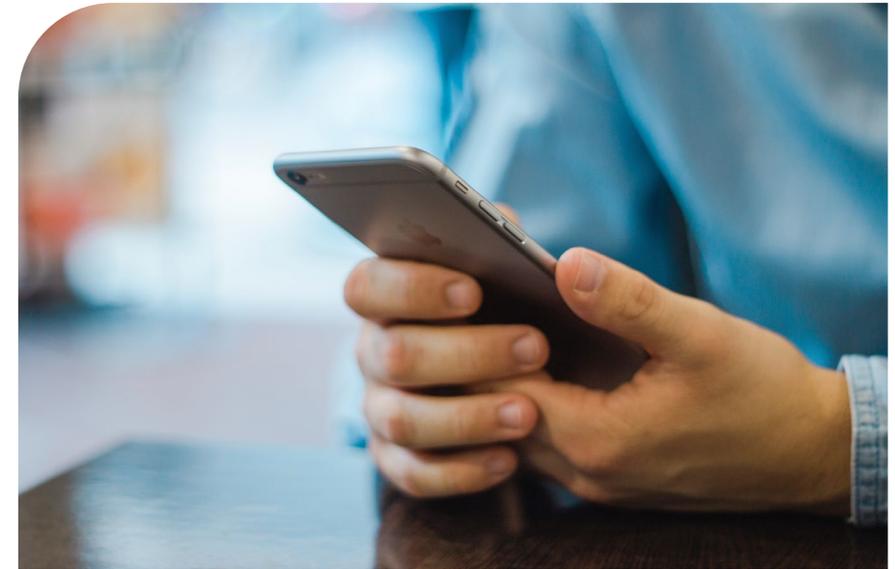
- For the majority (58%) of survey participants with LTHC their physical activity category (inactive, insufficiently active or active) stayed the same.
- Overall more participants (53%) felt they were doing less physical activity during the period of lockdown where they were advised to stay home, with around 30% doing a bit or a lot more.
- 39% of participants felt that their activity levels were still lower than before the pandemic suggesting they haven't yet recovered their previous activity habits.
- Around half of those who were in total isolation/quarantine reported doing a lot less activity over both the stay at home and the easing phases of the pandemic.



Changes in Support Preferences

The following support options demonstrated significantly higher scores for how useful individuals found them during the pandemic compared with before:

- Advice on how to get to places on foot or by bike (60% somewhat-very useful)
- Information on local greenspace where you can spend time outside (59% somewhat – very useful)
- Guidance on what you can do at home or by yourself (76% somewhat – very useful)
- **61% of survey participants with LTHCs felt that online activity or virtual sessions were somewhat - very useful during the pandemic.**



Changes in Support Preferences

When participants were asked again “how important is it to you that physical activities are...”, on average there was an **increased importance** placed on activities across all activity settings.

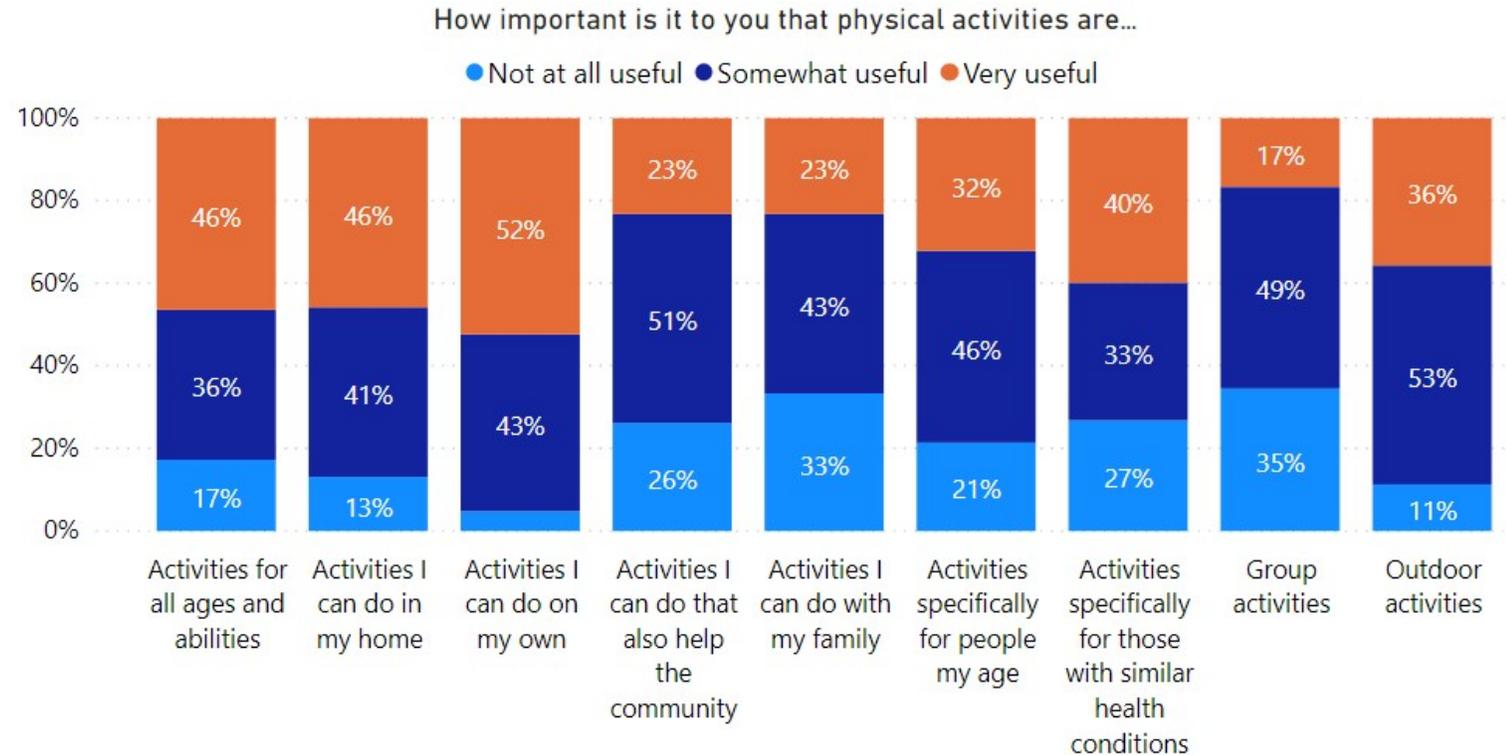
The greatest increase in importance was for:

- things they could do **on their own** (95% a bit or very important),
- **outdoors** (89% a bit or very important), and
- **in their home** (87% a bit or very important).

Changes in Communications Preferences

Before the pandemic, email was by far the most popular (25%) way people would like to receive advice and support for PA and health, and this has increased further to 33%.

Telephone, web chat and community support remained the least popular.



Local Responses – Motivations

The latest Active Norfolk survey results show that **the benefits that motivate people most are:**

1. Improved physical health
2. Improved mental health
3. Being able to look after myself
4. Preventing health condition worsening
5. Improved mobility
6. Reduced stress
7. Increased strength
8. Improving their overall health and boosting their immune system to fight off coronavirus
9. Reducing the symptoms of their conditions
10. Improving confidence and self-esteem



Local Responses – Motivations

Participants reported higher motivation on average across all but one of the possible benefits of physical activity during the pandemic compared with before.

The greatest increases in motivation to be active were:

- Reduce stress
- Improve mobility
- Being able to look after myself
- Improve mental health

Being able to participate with friends and family was the only benefit that was less motivational than before the pandemic, which is to be expected considering the social restrictions during lockdown.



The Emotional Impact

Sport England's qualitative research painted a stark picture of how the pandemic is impacting those living with LTHCs:

HEIGHTENED ANXIETY SAPPING MOTIVATION

Rollercoaster of feelings. Debilitating for some.
Exacerbated by isolation and condition severity

FEAR SURROUNDING LOCKDOWN EASING

Confusion surrounding government handling.
Worry about personal exposure

NEED FOR REASSURANCE RE THE SAFETY OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Self-directed activity raises questions over
suitability and safety of activities

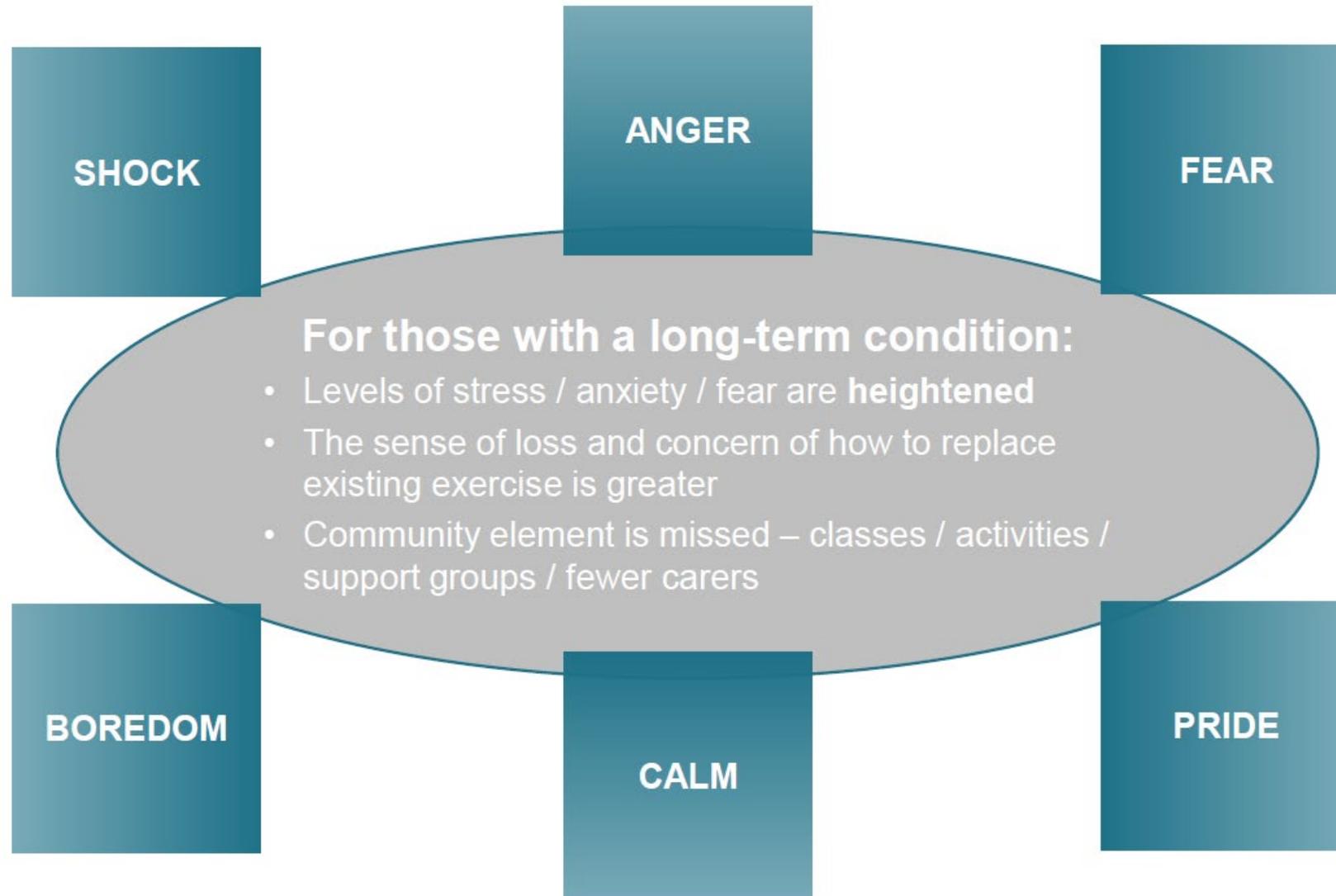
WARINESS RE SPORTS FACILITIES REOPENING

Lack of trust in implementation of guidelines and
behaviour of general public

OVERHWELMED BY INFORMATION

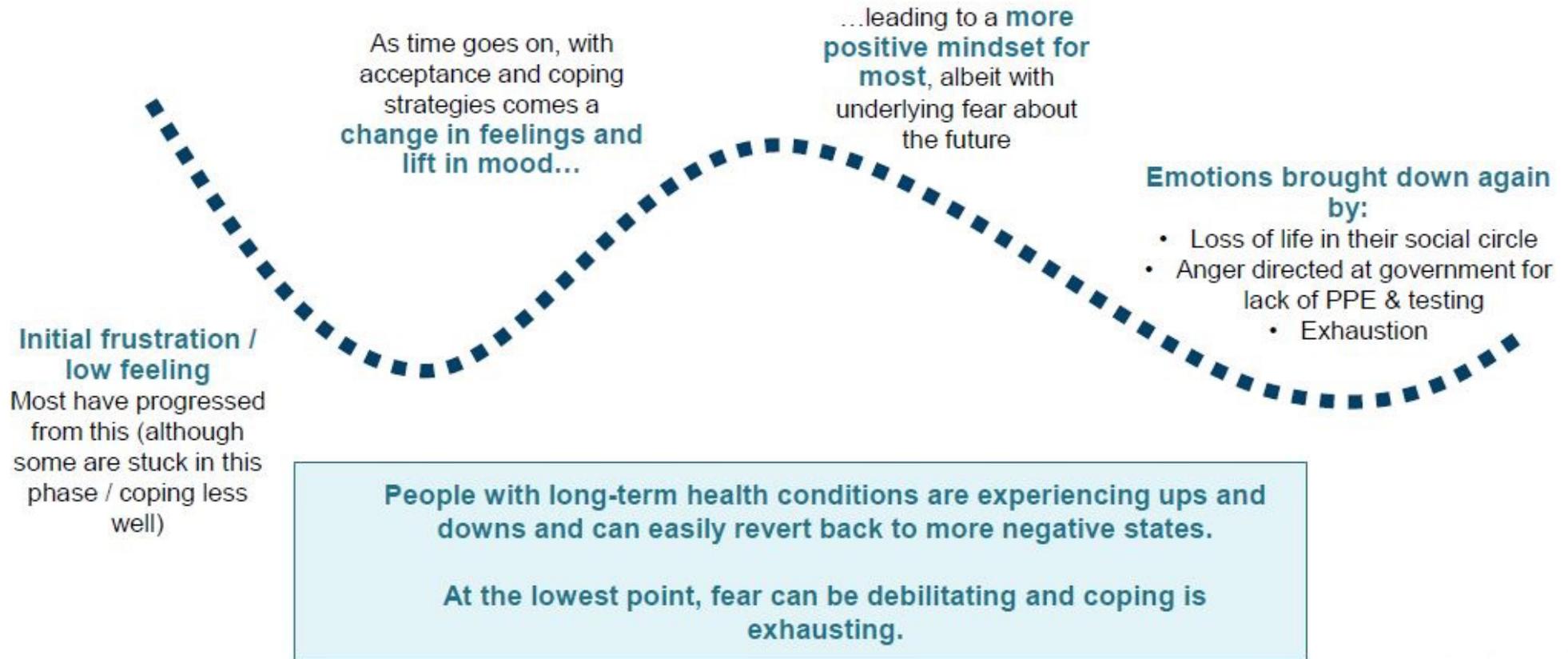
Struggling to filter and process, or tuning out altogether

Feelings and Motivations



Sport England research found that among the mix of emotions everyone is experiencing as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, **stress** is heightened for those with a LTCH

The Ups and Downs



- Consider the waves of emotions and motivations people may be feeling.
- Tailor messaging to support both the highs and lows of mood and motivation.

Real-life Reactions

"I will still avoid going out, even if I am deconditioning; catching COVID would be worse."

"I'm more than de-motivated. It's as if my brain has now been reconfigured to automatically discourage myself from doing anything...I've become so accustomed to not doing anything.

I might need therapy to get back into doing something. It's affected me so much I just cannot activate myself."

"I am very apprehensive and daily contemplate whether I would or wouldn't actually go out at all."

People with LTHCs can feel extremely fearful of lockdown easing, with overwhelming feelings of confusion, worry, and concern.

The majority are not comfortable returning to mixing with people and spending time outside of their house beyond essential journeys.

Support Considerations

- Many people with LTHCs are worried about leaving their homes, even as restrictions are relaxed for much of the population. It may take some time for people with LTHCs to return to pre-COVID-19 routines and habits.
- Consider how you can ensure people with LTHCs are supported to return to facilities and open spaces safely.
- Consider how you can improve and expand the range of choices for people to be active by providing online physical activity resources and support that people can do in and around their homes.
- It's also important to recognise that not everyone has the digital skills or opportunities to access online materials. Factoring in non-digital alternatives will be important in enabling you to reach and support more people in ways that are suitable for them.
- If you need access to, or inspiration for, non-digital resources, a leaflet highlighting 15 Ways to Move More At Home is available on the We Are Undefeatable website: <https://weareundefeatable.co.uk/getting-started>
- New independent research undertaken by Sheffield Hallam University estimates that every £1 spent on sport and physical activity generates an economic and social

Resources

Research

<https://www.sportengland.org/news/new-we-are-undefeatable-research-and-resources>

<https://www.sportengland.org/know-your-audience/demographic-knowledge/coronavirus>

<https://www.activenorfolk.org/long-term-conditions>

Resources to support physical activity

<https://www.activenorfolk.org/active-outdoors>

<https://www.activenorfolk.org/active-at-home>

<https://www.activenorfolk.org/health-professionals>

<https://www.activenorfolk.org/active-ageing>

