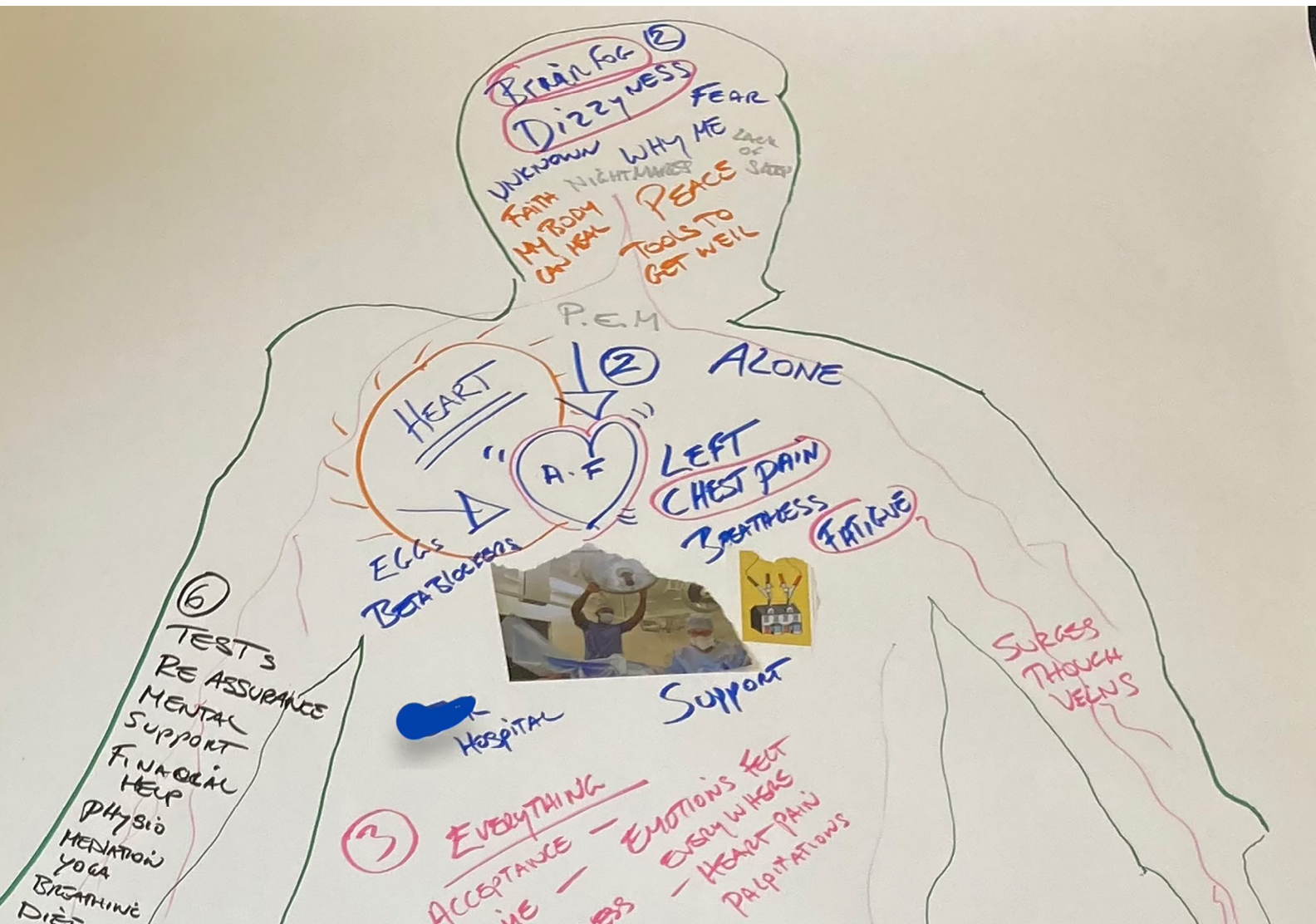


# Body Mapping Toolkit for individuals

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# Introduction: What is body mapping?

- Body mapping is a **community engagement tool** used to communicate and reflect on individual and collective experiences of a wide range of social phenomena.
- It is also a qualitative research method commonly used in social sciences, medical research, and art therapy to explore personal and collective experiences, particularly in relation to health.
- Participants **visually express their experiences** through drawing, writing, and collaging responses to guided questions on life-sized body outlines, facilitating the sharing of personal narratives.
- This arts-based approach is particularly beneficial for individuals who may find it challenging to articulate complex emotions or physical sensations.

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## Purpose of this toolkit

- This toolkit is designed to help individuals with Long Covid create a body map to **visually represent** their **experiences** with the condition.
- Body maps can serve as a useful tool to illustrate the **complexity of Long Covid**, its symptoms, and its impact on daily life. If you find it hard to explain your experiences to family, friends, or healthcare providers, creating and sharing a body map might help make these experiences more tangible and easier to understand.
- This toolkit is intended for individual use, allowing people to create their own body maps at their own pace.

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## Preparing for body mapping

Before beginning the body mapping process, it's important to be well-prepared. While many people find body mapping to be a positive experience, it can also be physically and emotionally demanding. **Ensure you have the appropriate support system** in place before starting, and refer to the list of Long Covid support organisations included at the end of this toolkit. It is also important to find a quiet, safe, and confidential space to complete your body map.

Cover picture credit: The authors. Photo taken and shared with kind permission from workshop participant.



## Step 1: Gather materials

Essential materials:

- Paper for the body map (A4 or larger)
- A few more sheets of blank A4 paper
- Any type of coloured markers/pencils/pens/crayons
- Old magazines/newspapers you can cut up
- Glue and scissors

Nice to have, but not required:

- Coloured paper
- Tissue paper
- Paint/brushes
- Any crafty bits (stickers/ribbons etc.)

## Step 2: Create your body map outline

There are two options for creating your body map outline:

- 1. Drawing by hand:** Your body map outline can be any size, from A4 upwards. It can be drawn by someone else tracing around your body, if you have access to this form of assistance. Alternatively, you can draw the outline freehand by yourself.
- 2. Using a pre-drawn outline:** We have attached an example of pre-drawn outlines that you may prefer to use. If you prefer this option, please print this off.

## Step 3: Create space for post-workshop rest and support

For example, you may wish to prepare a small snack for the end of the session or organise your day so you can rest immediately after the session. Many people find it also helps to have a friend, partner or relative nearby (or contactable) who can provide companionship and emotional support afterwards.



# Body mapping process

Before beginning the body mapping activity, you may like to do a mindfulness and/or creative exercise to ease yourself into the process. These exercises are meant to encourage you to connect with your body and start to think creatively

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## Mindfulness exercise (Optional)

For a relaxation exercise of about 10 minutes, you can just close your eyes (in a seated position or lying down), put on some calm music if you wish, and take a few moments just for yourself. You can also use a short online meditation video or audio.

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## Creative exercise (Optional)

For this activity, you'll need a pen and a few sheets of paper.

- Set a timer for 45 seconds and press start.
- **Think about how your body feels today.** Close your eyes or soften your gaze, without looking at the paper, draw something that embodies a feeling resulting from this. The goal is to freely create expressive marks on paper, such as lines, scribbles, or shapes, without the pressure of creating literal representations.
- **Afterward, open your eyes or shift your gaze to the paper to observe your creation.** Try not to judge yourself or your drawings. Remember, there's no right or wrong way to do this; it's about expressing your unique experiences.
- **Repeat the exercise one or two more times**, using different variations such as switching hands, drawing styles, pen, or size of drawing.



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## Creating your body map

Unless you are using the preprinted version, start by drawing your body map outline using the different options explained above.

Then you can move onto crafting your body map. The objective is to create something that represents your experience with Long Covid. There are no rules or right ways to do this; focus on expressing your unique experience. You can draw, collage, or write inside or outside the outline, based on what feels right to you. If you'd like to see some examples of body maps created by others, take a look at our website here: <https://visualisinglongcovid.org>

We have some questions to prompt you, but please don't let these limit you. You may like to pick one and see where it takes you. If you feel you have finished the first one, then pick another.

- 1. Life before Long Covid:** How did you experience your health before the symptoms started? Write a sentence/draw an image about how you experienced your health before.
- 2. Symptoms:** What kind of symptoms do you experience and where in your body do you experience these symptoms?
- 3. Living with Long Covid:** Do you feel that Long Covid has affected your ability to live your everyday life? Where in your body would you draw the impact of Long Covid?
- 4. Emotional impact:** What kind of emotions do you associate with the experience, and where would you place them in your body? Where in your body do you feel weakness or strength?
- 5. Support with Long Covid:** Do you feel that you have received support throughout your journey with Long Covid? What kind of support did you receive, and what kind of feelings did this leave in your mind and body?
- 6. Improving your quality of life:** What kind of support would you need to improve your quality of life?

The time you spend on body mapping is entirely up to you. Some people finish within an hour, while others may take longer. It can be helpful to take breaks, giving yourself time to reflect. Some people do it in one session and some people do it over a number of days or weeks. It is up to you! Most importantly, avoid overexerting yourself.

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## Closing the body mapping session

Consider ending your body mapping session by revisiting the mindfulness exercise to help process the emotions and thoughts that may have surfaced during the activity. This can provide closure to the experience and help you step back from the intensity of the process.



# Acknowledgements

This toolkit was developed by Oonagh Cousins and Jo Dainow from Long Covid Support, and Dr Maaret Jokela-Pansini and Professor Beth Greenhough from the University of Oxford.

We are deeply grateful to the volunteers with Long Covid who participated in our piloting and development sessions, and to our advisory board Nisreen Alwan (Professor of Public Health at the University of Southampton), Ella Barnard (patient with lived experience of Long Covid), Caroline Dalton (Associate Professor of Neuroscience and Genetics at Sheffield Hallam University) Gail Davies (Professor in Human Geography at the University of Exeter) and Mark Faghy (Professor in Clinical Exercise Science at the School of Sport and Exercise Science, University of Derby).

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## About the Authors



### Oonagh Cousins

Oonagh Cousins is Communications and Fundraising Associate at Long Covid Support and member of the #ThereForME campaign team. She is a former professional athlete from the British Rowing Team. She was preselected for the Tokyo Olympics in March 2020, but was forced to retire from professional sport as a result of Long Covid. She holds an MSc in Development Studies from SOAS, and MA in Biological Natural Sciences from University of Cambridge. Oonagh regularly engages with the media, utilising her platform as a professional athlete to raise awareness and advocate for Long Covid.



### Jo Dainow

Jo Dainow has lived experience of Long Covid and is a founder member and trustee of Long Covid Support. Jo manages the charity's operations and is one of the administrators of the Long Covid Support Facebook group and co-facilitates the charity's peer support work, managing wellbeing activities for members. Jo is experienced in coaching and mentoring, is a volunteer walk leader for Walk Wandsworth (on hold due to Long Covid) and a Director of a Vintage VW Campervan hire company. Her previous professional experience was within the creative operations area of the entertainments industry and marketing agencies.





### **Maaret Jokela-Pansini**

Maaret Jokela-Pansini is a postdoctoral research fellow at the School of Geography and the Environment at the University of Oxford. She is interested in experiences of health and wellbeing related to illness, quality of life, and environmental risks, their impact on people's daily lives, and the underlying inequalities. Drawing on her background in non-governmental organisations, Maaret's research is deeply rooted in community-and arts-based methodologies, bridging the gap between academia and public engagement. She is also a certified yoga teacher (200 hours).



### **Beth Greenhough**

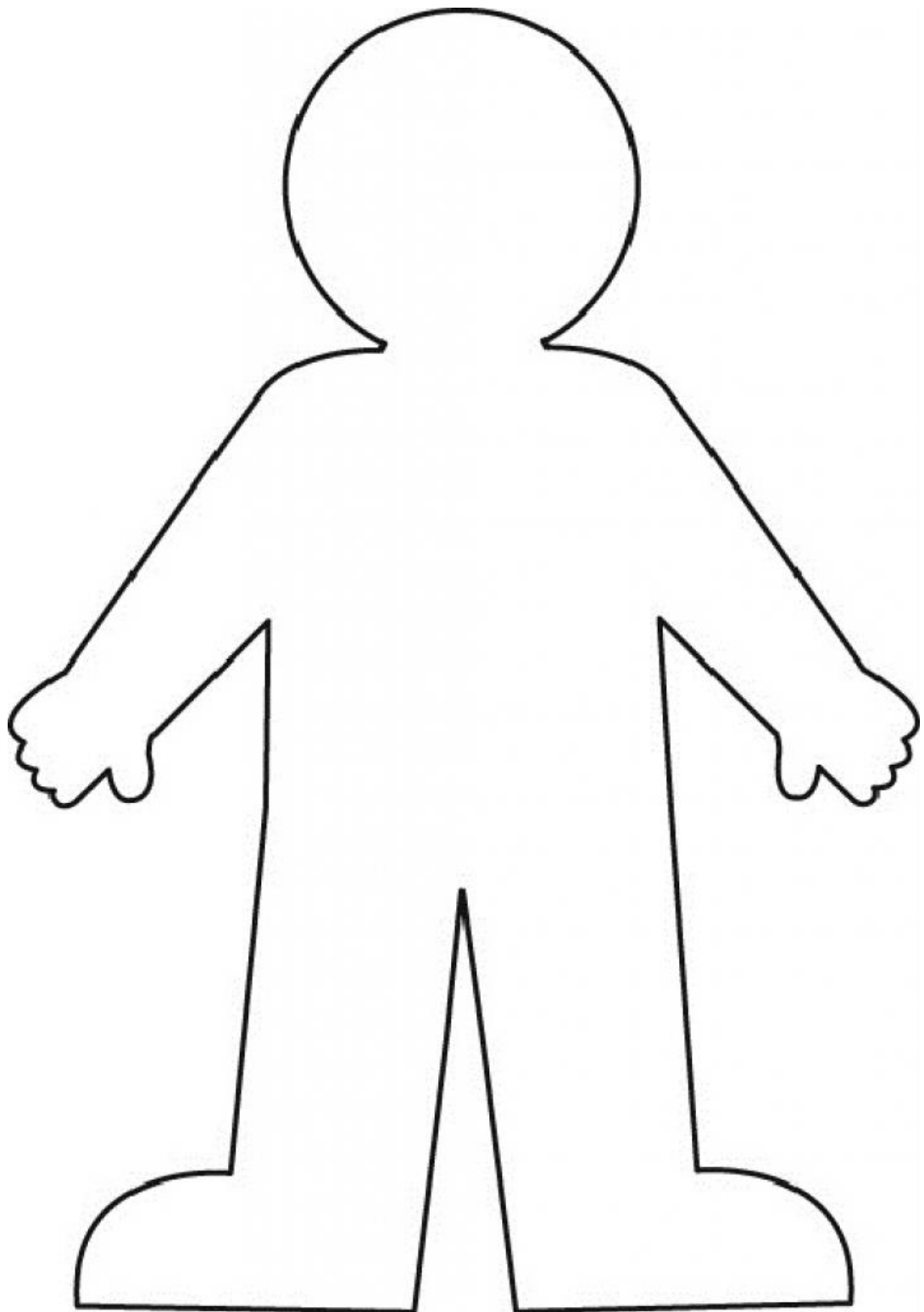
Beth Greenhough is professor of human geography and fellow of Keble College, Oxford. Her research explores the ways in which humans and animals become resources for biomedical research, and the role of patient and public expertise in developing understandings of health and disease. She is a co-author of *Bodies Across Borders* (Ashgate) *Health Geographies: A Critical Introduction* (Wiley-Blackwell) and *Bioinformation* (Polity).



# Appendices

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## Body map outline template





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## Where to find information and support on Long Covid

**Please note:** This is a collection of links recommended by some of our collaborators. We do not moderate these pages, so we are unable to accept any responsibility for their content.

- Long Covid support [www.longcovid.org](http://www.longcovid.org) and [www.facebook.com/groups/longcovid/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/longcovid/)
- Long Covid Wales [www.facebook.com/groups/longcovidwales](https://www.facebook.com/groups/longcovidwales)
- Long Covid Scotland [www.longcovid.scot](http://www.longcovid.scot)
- Long Covid Kids [www.longcovidkids.org](http://www.longcovidkids.org)
- The Sick Times: [thesicktimes.org/resources/](http://thesicktimes.org/resources/)
- The Long Covid Clinic: What You CAN Do: [www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLLdts3KmT2mxI9nP\\_S0F95Ziv5kM3XaCv](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLLdts3KmT2mxI9nP_S0F95Ziv5kM3XaCv)

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