

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Long COVID (post-COVID Syndrome)

### Frequently Asked Questions regarding Long COVID (post-COVID syndrome)

*Anna Jaques' Pulmonologist, Essam Ansari, MD, answers your frequently asked questions around Long COVID.*

#### **What is a COVID Long-Hauler?**

Patients who experience persistent symptoms after recovering from a COVID infection are called "COVID long-haulers" because they are suffering from Long COVID. This condition is also known as post-COVID syndrome or chronic COVID. The World Health Organization now recognizes Long COVID as a disease entity, or a subcategory of COVID symptoms.

#### **Who is at risk for Long COVID, and how can it be prevented?**

Much is still unknown about what causes COVID symptoms to persist for some people and not others. Some studies suggest that having type 2 diabetes or having previously been infected by Epstein-Barr virus puts someone at higher risk for developing Long COVID. Other risk factors have to do with a person's unique immune response to the virus or the composition of bacteria in the gut.

What's important to remember is that it is possible for anyone who gets COVID to develop Long COVID, so following measures that protect against infection in the first place – vaccination, social distancing, wearing a mask, and hand hygiene – is the best way to prevent this condition.

#### **What are the symptoms of Long COVID?**

For COVID long-haulers, the following symptoms may continue for three months or more from the onset of COVID:

- Physical limitations, such as fatigue, during one or more life activities.
- Cardiac and respiratory symptoms, including shortness of breath, cough and chest pain.
- Psychological symptoms, including anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, loss of memory and concentration.

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Other symptoms could include:

- loss of smell
- headache
- decreased appetite
- joint and muscle pain
- insomnia
- diarrhea

### **How long will it take for the symptoms to resolve?**

This seems to depend on the severity of the initial COVID infection and the underlying co-morbidities of each patient. Symptoms in mild COVID cases typically resolve within two weeks. Symptoms in a more severe disease typically resolve within two to three months.

Longer recovery time is typically expected in patients who require hospitalization. However, even patients with milder COVID symptoms have experienced Long COVID.

### **What will the hospital do to help patients manage Long COVID symptoms?**

We address our patients' unique symptoms and may refer them to specialists with the experience and ability to treat them.

#### *Neurologic symptoms:*

A referral to a neurologist may be necessary for patients dealing with neurological complications that arise from acute COVID. This includes symptoms such as seizures, stroke, and severe weakness in the limbs.

#### *Cognitive or psychological symptoms:*

A neuropsychological evaluation may be needed for patients with persistent memory and concentration problems.

Patients with more severe depression, anxiety, or PTSD symptoms may benefit from a referral to a psychiatrist for additional help.

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### *Respiratory symptoms:*

We check for underlying cardiac or pulmonary disease in all patients experiencing Long COVID. Sometimes steroids might be prescribed for patients with underlying pneumonia.

Breathing exercises can be helpful for those with mild respiratory symptoms. We assess the need for oxygen therapy and for referral to pulmonary rehabilitation.

Other examples of patient care in this area include treating a cough with over-the-counter cough medications, inhaled bronchodilators, or steroids if necessary.

### *Chronic fatigue:*

Patients struggling with fatigue as a result of Long COVID will receive care similar to those being treated for chronic fatigue syndrome. Adequate rest, healthy sleep habits, a healthy diet, and hydration are encouraged.

Patients may be referred to physical therapy and gradually return to being more active.

### *Social Services:*

Social support may be needed for patients and families who have experienced a lot of stress and anxiety.

Depending on their symptoms, physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, and pulmonary and cardiac rehabilitation are all available to help patients dealing with Long COVID.

### *Renal disease:*

Long-term kidney problems and the need for dialysis may sometimes arise for patients with severe acute COVID disease.

### **How long can Long COVID symptoms last?**

The answer is that we do not know. We'll need time, research, and experience with this condition to understand more about how long the symptoms last.