

Long COVID and Post COVID Syndrome in adults

SELF-CARE FORUM FACT SHEET NO. 19

This fact sheet helps you to know when and where to get help and advice about long COVID and Post-COVID syndrome in adults. It also advises on what you can do to maintain and improve your health and wellbeing on the road to recovery.

Useful facts

You may hear people referring to both 'Long COVID' and 'Post-COVID Syndrome'. The definitions below are from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and will be used in this fact sheet.

- **Long COVID** is when signs and symptoms of COVID-19 last between 4-12 weeks after developing the virus.
- **Post-COVID Syndrome** is when signs and symptoms that develop during or after a COVID-19 infection last more than 12 weeks and are not explained by another diagnosis

How long will it take to recover from COVID-19?

Recovery from Acute COVID-19 can take 2-4 weeks, but some people have symptoms for 12 weeks or more. The [World Health Organisation](#) (WHO) recognises it as a diverse condition. Whether COVID is mild or requires hospital care, symptoms can continue, come back, change, or new ones may appear.

Most people recover from Long COVID and Post-COVID Syndrome. Among those diagnosed with COVID-19, 3 out of 10 have at least one symptom at 4 weeks, dropping to 1 out of 10 after 12 weeks. Some people still have symptoms at 6 months, whether they were hospitalised or not. Symptoms can be mild or serious and disabling.

Remember you are not alone

In 2024, it is estimated that 1.9 million people (2.9% of the population) had self-reported Long COVID for more than 4 weeks and 41% (762,000 people) had symptoms for over 2 years.

Possible Long COVID symptoms

Long COVID can cause many different symptoms. These symptoms can appear in groups, often overlapping. They can change over time, affect any part of the body, and vary in severity and impact on daily life.

Long COVID symptoms can include:

Generalised - fatigue (commonest symptom), fever, headache.

Lung - breathlessness, cough.

Heart - chest tightness, chest pain, heart palpitations.

Nervous system - 'brain fog', loss of concentration or memory problems, headache, problems sleeping, pins and needles (peripheral neuropathy symptom).

Dermatological - skin rashes

Musculoskeletal - joint and muscle pain

Ear, nose, throat - loss of taste or/and smell, tinnitus, earache, sore throat, dizziness.

Gastrointestinal - feeling sick, stomach pain, diarrhoea, anorexia and reduced appetite

Psychological - depression, anxiety

The most common symptoms of Long COVID are: extreme tiredness (fatigue), memory or concentration problems ('brain fog'), short of breath (breathlessness), heart palpitations, dizziness, joint and muscle aches.

What can I do to get myself better now and in the future?

If you think you have Long COVID, talk to your healthcare provider. Ask questions and help plan your recovery. For advice on managing symptoms, visit the [NHS website](#) if you have internet access or speak to a member of your pharmacy team.

Remember, some symptoms might not be related to COVID. A new cough or breathlessness lasting over 3 weeks with a negative COVID test could be lung cancer. Blood in your poo, urine, or spit, trouble swallowing, or changes in bowel habits (diarrhoea or constipation) should be discussed with your doctor urgently. If you're worried about symptoms, talk to a GP or contact NHS111, NHS24, or Phone First (depending on where you are in the UK). You can also find helpful information on the Cancer Research website.

What can I do to get myself better now and in the future - continued

Monitoring your symptoms - It can be helpful to track your goals, symptoms, progress, and feelings during recovery. You can use a diary or a symptom tracking app. Note down your symptoms, what you can do, and any positive changes. This can help you see improvements and find links between symptoms and activities. Also, record your recovery activities like sleep, diet, and exercise (as advised by your healthcare professional).

Support - Support groups have been set up and can help you share experiences and find support. Check the 'Where to find out more' section for details. You might also enjoy local activities through Social Prescribing. Ask your GP practice for more information.

Self-care - Take care of your general health. Eat a healthy diet (or one advised by your healthcare professional), stay hydrated, get enough sleep, and start moving again, especially if COVID-19 has stopped you from doing things.

Smell training - Loss of smell is a common Long COVID symptom. 'Smell training' can help improve it by sniffing four different scents several times a day. Popular choices are rose, eucalyptus, lemon, and clove. [The 5th Sense website](#) has advice.

If your symptoms aren't improving or are worrying, contact your GP practice. Work with your healthcare professionals to set realistic goals at your own pace. You can do this before and after any tests or Post-COVID clinic appointments.

What can I expect to happen?

Most people recover from Long COVID within a few weeks. If your symptoms are mild, you may be able to manage them on your own. If Long COVID is suspected, your GP will take your medical history, including any past COVID-19 infection, your symptoms, how long you've had them, and any other conditions like diabetes, heart disease, lung issues (like COPD), or mobility problems.

They might ask about memory, thinking, or concentration problems ('brain fog'), how you're coping daily, and changes to mood or behaviour.

Oxygen levels - Oxygen levels may be checked during tests like sitting and standing for one minute. You might also need to monitor your oxygen levels at home using a small device clipped to your finger.

Tests - More tests may be needed to see if your symptoms are caused by something else or to understand how COVID-19 is affecting you. Tests might include blood tests, exercise tolerance tests, blood pressure and heart rate monitoring, a chest X-ray, and referrals for mental health support. Follow-up is important because Long COVID symptoms can change over time. Even if you feel well initially, you might still need follow-up. If symptoms are severe, you may be referred to an NHS Post-COVID clinic or local services for specific conditions. This helps you get support from various healthcare professionals.

Where to find out more

General information about Long COVID

- [SIGN - Long COVID Patient Booklet](#)
- [NICE Guideline \[NG188\] - Information for public](#)
- [NHS Website](#)

Managing fatigue

- [RCOT - Recovering from COVID-19: Post viral-fatigue and conserving energy](#)

Nutrition

- [Plymouth University - COVID Knowledge hub](#)

Support

- [COVID-19 Survivors Group UK](#)
- [Long COVID support](#)

Returning to work

- [SOMs COVID-19 Returning to work Guide](#)

When to seek help

Contact your GP practice if:

- You think you may have Long COVID symptoms.
- Your symptoms are worsening, not improving, or are concerning you.

It's important to determine whether these symptoms are part of Long COVID or due to an unrelated health issue.