

Long COVID factsheet

Definition

For some people, coronavirus (COVID-19) causes symptoms that last weeks or months after the initial infection. This is called **long COVID**.

The term long COVID is commonly used to describe signs and symptoms that continue or develop after acute COVID-19, covering both ongoing symptomatic COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 syndrome.



Acute COVID-19

Signs and symptoms of COVID-19 for up to 4 weeks.



Ongoing symptomatic COVID-19

Signs and symptoms of COVID-19 from 4 to 12 weeks.



Post-COVID-19 syndrome/

Signs and symptoms that develop during or after an infection consistent with COVID-19, continue for more than 12 weeks and are not explained by an alternative diagnosis.

Long COVID is a new condition and further advice will become available as knowledge grows over time.

Long COVID facts

- How long it takes to recover from coronavirus is different for everybody.
- Many people feel better in a few days or weeks and most will make a full recovery within 12 weeks, but for some people, symptoms can last longer.
- Fatigue is the most common ongoing symptom.
- The chances of having long-term symptoms does not seem to be linked to how unwell a patient was when they first had COVID-19. People who had mild symptoms at first can still have long-term problems.
- There are lots of symptoms you can have after a coronavirus infection.

Common long COVID symptoms include:

- extreme tiredness (fatigue)
- shortness of breath
- chest pain or tightness
- problems with memory and concentration ("brain fog")
- difficulty sleeping (insomnia)
- heart palpitations
- dizziness
- pins and needles
- joint pain
- depression and anxiety
- tinnitus, earaches
- stomach problems such as feeling sick, diarrhoea, stomach aches, or loss of appetite

- common COVID symptoms such as a high temperature, cough, headaches, sore throat, or changes to sense of smell or taste
- rashes

The symptoms of a pre-existing underlying health condition may also be exacerbated by COVID infection.

When to seek medical help

Contact your GP if you are worried about having symptoms 4 weeks or more after having coronavirus.

Your doctor will ask about your symptoms and the impact they are having on your life. They may suggest some tests to find out more about your symptoms and rule out other things that could be causing them.

These might include:

- blood tests
- checking your blood pressure and heart rate
- a chest X-ray

If the symptoms are having a big impact on your life, you may be referred to a specialist rehabilitation service or a service that specialises in the specific symptoms you have.

Long COVID clinics are being set up across England, with centres locally in Bath, Bristol, Gloucestershire, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire, Swindon, and Wiltshire. Your GP will be able to refer you to a specialist for advice/treatment if necessary.

Employees living in Wales should seek advice from their GP about accessing a clinic.

Vaccine

Having prolonged COVID-19 symptoms is not a contraindication to receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. However, if you are seriously debilitated, still under active investigation, or have recently deteriorated, you should discuss this with your GP, as deferral of vaccination may be considered. You will still require the vaccine for the highest level of protection.

Immunity

There is not yet enough evidence to confirm whether you are protected against further infection after you have had COVID-19 and, if so, for how long. The current antibody test only shows whether you have been exposed to the virus in the past.

At work

Talk to your line manager if you are struggling with symptoms of long COVID. Your working hours and duties can be reviewed to support your health needs.

Your manager may want to refer you to Occupational Health for an individual health assessment and advice regarding support and adjustments at work.

If you are returning to work after a long-term period of sickness absence due to COVID-19, you will also be offered a phased supported return to work over at least 4 weeks.

If you are working from home and do not have to provide a service within core hours, make the most of the flexibility this gives you. You will benefit from pacing yourself throughout the day at home and working when you are most productive.

It is also important to keep engaged with work by meeting regularly with your team and line manager.

For more information, please visit the [Occupational Health Service web pages](#).

Wellbeing

Maintaining your wellbeing will support and promote your recovery, improve your overall health and help keep other underlying health conditions stable. Be reassured that time and rest will heal you.



Eating well

Your body needs energy, protein, vitamins and minerals to help you recover. Getting the right nutrition can be difficult due to loss of appetite, smell and taste changes, and fatigue, but it's important to try to eat well.

Having a good intake of protein and energy-rich foods supports you with rebuilding muscles, maintaining your immune system and increasing your energy levels to allow you to do your usual activities.

Once recovered, it is advised that body weight is kept within a healthy BMI range because obesity is a recognised risk factor for COVID-19.



Sleeping well

Sleep plays an essential role in recovery. It is important to get enough sleep, and to have good quality sleep every night.

Sleep hygiene practices can help develop healthy sleeping patterns. The Staff Counselling Service runs [Sleep Clinics](#) to help staff take steps to improve the quality and quantity of sleep.



Getting moving again

Exercise helps develop muscle strength and plays a role in maintaining a healthy weight and feeling good. Aim for a gradual return to activities and exercise when you can, while pacing yourself.

Be careful not to do too much exercise too quickly. Some people may find their symptoms are worsened by pushing themselves too hard. This is known as the boom-and-bust cycle, where intense activities are followed by a crash and the need to recover. Having a good day does not mean you should try to do more the next day.

For more information on getting moving, visit the [Sport, Exercise and Health web pages](#).



Feeling well

Spend time with family and friends and seek support with your mental health if necessary.

More information and support

Support from the University:

- [Wellbeing web page](#)
- [Staff Counselling Service Intranet site](#)
- For additional support or advice, ask your manager about how to access the University Employee Assistance Programme: Care First.

External resources:

- Learn more about recovery from COVID-19 at www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk.
- [Long Covid Support](#) is an international peer support and advocacy group for people living with long COVID.

Information for line managers

- Be aware that each individual may experience different symptoms in varying degrees of severity. They may continue to have good and bad days once they are back at work so may require flexibility with hours and/or workload.
- Recovery is nonlinear and is often characterised by periods of feeling better followed by relapses. If employees return to work too soon, it is not likely to be sustainable and could result in further sickness absence.
- Contact [Occupational Health](#) or Human Resources for further advice regarding workplace adjustments and support.
- For additional information, please read the [Guidance for managers and employers on facilitating return to work of employees with long-COVID](#) from the Royal College of Physician's Faculty of Occupational Medicine.

References

- [NICE: COVID-19 rapid guideline: managing the long-term effects of COVID-19](#)
- [NHS: Long-term effects of coronavirus \(long COVID\) - NHS](#)
- [GOV UK: COVID-19 Greenbook chapter 14a](#)