

Understanding Post-COVID Syndrome

What is Post-COVID Syndrome?

Post-COVID Syndrome is an umbrella term for a wide range of symptoms that develop or continue four or more weeks after infection with SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

You may hear it called long COVID, long-haul COVID, post-acute COVID-19, long-term effects of COVID, post-acute COVID syndrome, post-COVID condition, or chronic COVID.

Post-COVID Syndrome is considered as a possibility when someone does not return to their normal state of health following acute COVID-19 illness. Post-COVID conditions might also include development of new or recurrent symptoms after the symptoms of acute COVID-19 illness have resolved.

A quick resource to explain what patients may experience after COVID-19 infection.

Who can get Post-COVID Syndrome?

Anyone who has been infected with SARS-CoV-2 can develop Post-COVID Syndrome. Even if you had no symptoms, you could develop long-term health issues from COVID-19.

This condition is new. Experts are working to understand more about who experiences Post-COVID Syndrome and the long-term effects.

What are the symptoms of Post-COVID Syndrome?

There are a wide range of new or ongoing symptoms associated with Post-COVID syndrome that can impact daily life. For some people, symptoms can overlap with effects of treatment or hospitalization. This list will be updated as we learn more.

The symptoms most commonly reported are:

- Shortness of breath (dyspnea) or trouble breathing, cough
- Fatigue or post-exertional malaise*
- Poor endurance during exercise
- Brain fog or cognitive impairment
- Chest pain, changes in heart rate (palpitations)
- Headache, muscle aches, joint pain
- Tingling sensation in hands, feet, etc.
- Abdominal issues (pain, diarrhea)
- Mood changes

- Impaired daily function and mobility
- Loss of taste or smell
- Rash
- Menstrual cycle irregularities

** Post-exertional malaise (PEM) occurs when symptoms are worse after physical or mental effort (exertion). Symptoms usually get worse around 12 to 48 hours after activity and may continue for days or even weeks.*

What tests are used to diagnose Post-COVID Syndrome?

There is currently no lab test available to diagnose Post-COVID Syndrome. Because the symptoms are so wide-ranging, it's often difficult to diagnose post-COVID conditions from other conditions or illnesses. While a positive COVID-19 test could signal a current or previous infection, it is not required to receive a diagnosis of a post-COVID condition.

Other tests may be performed to address any ongoing symptoms or to determine if referrals to other services could be helpful. Tests may include laboratory tests, cognitive function tests, and questions to assess the impact on daily living, mobility, or sleep.

How is Post-COVID Syndrome treated?

For most patients, the goal will be managing post-COVID conditions to improve function and quality of life. Your family physician will work with you to develop a comprehensive management plan based your symptoms, any additional chronic physical and mental health needs, treatment goals, and your individual situation and circumstances.

Some conditions or symptoms may improve using techniques that can be performed at home, like breathing exercises to improve lung function or techniques like olfactory training to regain the sense of taste and smell. Other symptoms or conditions will need a more comprehensive plan and referral for rehabilitation.

Diaries/journals or calendars may be used to help document changes in health conditions and symptoms. This could provide insight into any triggers such as exercise or mental exertion, foods, menstruation, or medications. Be sure to tell your doctor if you have new or changing symptoms or have altered your routine.

Read more about Post-COVID Conditions at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/long-term-effects.html>.