



## LONG COVID: WHAT DO WE KNOW?

We may be far from fully understanding long Covid – and Covid-19 in general – but we do know that it's very real for those living with it. Here's what you need to know about long Covid.

### WHAT IS LONG COVID?

The more colloquial phrase 'long Covid' refers to what the World Health Organization (WHO) calls 'post Covid-19 condition'. It's a cluster of long-term symptoms that arise within three months of being infected with Covid.

How do you know it's long Covid? According to the WHO, the symptoms persist for a minimum of two months and can't be explained by any other illness. Symptoms may be new, (developing after recovery from Covid-19) or they may never go away after the initial infection. Symptoms may fluctuate, or disappear and come back over time, and they generally impact your ability to function in day-to-day life.

### WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF LONG COVID?

According to the WHO, the most common symptoms include:

- Fatigue
- Shortness of breath
- Problems with memory or concentration ('brain fog')
- An ongoing cough
- Chest pain or tightness
- Difficulty speaking
- Muscle aches
- Loss of smell or taste
- Depression or anxiety
- Fever

### WHAT CAUSES LONG COVID?

Doctors and scientists don't know for sure, but they believe that long Covid could be the result of damage done by the virus when someone is first infected with Covid-19. However, it could also be the result of the body's own immune system, triggered by the initial infection.

Other working theories include symptoms being caused by 'pockets' of virus that have remained active in the body; inflammation of small blood vessels; or a kind of abnormal blood clotting known as microclots.

### HOW COMMON IS LONG COVID?

According to some reports, around 100 million people worldwide are living with long Covid, and as many as one in 10 people who get

Covid-19 haven't fully recovered nine months later.

### WHO IS MOST LIKELY TO GET LONG COVID?

Anyone who contracts Covid-19 is at risk of long Covid. However, according to the National Institute for Communicable Diseases, groups that seem to be at higher risk include the elderly, women (particularly middle aged) and people who had more symptoms or had to be hospitalised when they were first ill with Covid-19. Pre-existing clinical depression, obesity and asthma are also risk factors.

It's believed that long Covid is less likely to develop in people who are fully vaccinated.

### CAN SOMEONE WITH LONG COVID INFECT OTHERS?

People with long Covid can't infect others – Covid-19 can be spread only during the initial period of infection, which is usually 10 days from the onset of symptoms.

### HOW IS LONG COVID DIAGNOSED?

There's no way to test for long Covid itself. A healthcare practitioner may diagnose it after ruling out other illnesses that could be causing similar symptoms (including viral respiratory infections, bacterial pneumonia, tuberculosis, depression, anxiety and symptoms related to diabetes and high blood pressure).

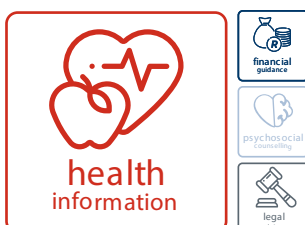
Your blood pressure, heart rate and oxygen levels may all be measured when diagnosing long Covid. Depending on your symptoms, you may require blood tests, a chest X-ray or an electrocardiogram (ECG).

### MANAGING LONG COVID

There's currently no cure for long Covid, and how long it lasts differs from person to person. Extreme tiredness is believed to be the most difficult long Covid symptom to manage. Careful planning, prioritisation of tasks and taking things slowly can help. For example:

- Plan ahead for each day or week, spreading out activities and scheduling in rest time.
- Eat a well-balanced diet and do low-intensity exercise, like walking or gentle yoga, to build up muscle strength and endurance. If exercise is exhausting or causes pain, stop.
- If sleep is a problem, speak to a doctor about short-term medication that may help.
- Relaxation techniques like meditation can improve sleep and reduce fatigue and stress. Apps like Calm, Headspace and Insight Timer offer free meditations.

For more Covid-19 information, visit the [Life Healthcare COVID-19 hub](#).



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