



Employee Advice Guide: **Long COVID**

**Weeks, and even months,
after contracting COVID-19,
large numbers of people
are still finding themselves
battling debilitating
symptoms of the condition
– known as ‘Long COVID’.**

**For the official NICE
definition of Long COVID**

Scientists and health professionals are still unclear why some people suffer from persistent symptoms long after the initial infection, or whether they will fully recover. This is mainly due to the wide range of possible symptoms, as well as it not seeming to be linked with how ill you were when you initially had the virus – you may have even been asymptomatic (showing no symptoms at all).

So what do you need to know? Here, we look at the signs you need to look out for and the steps to take to aid your recovery from Long COVID.



Signs and symptoms

According to the NHS, here are just some of the symptoms you could be experiencing if you have Long COVID:

- Fatigue
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain or tightness
- Memory and concentration problems (brain fog)
- Difficulty sleeping
- Heart palpitations
- Dizziness
- Pins and needles
- Joint pain
- Depression and anxiety
- Ear issues, like earache and tinnitus
- Sickness, diarrhoea, stomach ache and loss of appetite
- High temperature, cough, headaches and sore throat
- Changes to sense of smell or taste
- A rash



Top facts about Long COVID

1

It isn't contagious, so you don't have to worry about passing it onto your loved ones, colleagues or strangers in the supermarket

2

Long COVID can affect anyone, yet research has found older people, females and those who experienced a greater number of symptoms in their first week of infection are most likely to suffer from the condition

3

People who were asymptomatic or had mild symptoms can also be affected

4

Fatigue is the most common symptom

5

674,000 people suffering from Long COVID revealed it was affecting their day-to-day lives, with almost 200,000 saying their ability to carry out normal activities has been severely limited



STEPS TO TAKE TO AID YOUR ROAD TO RECOVERY

Don't suffer in silence

If you think you're suffering from Long COVID, speak to your GP as they can provide helpful advice, organise tests and refer you for specialist help. They may even refer you to an NHS-run Long COVID clinic – a clinic which brings together doctors, nurses, physiotherapists and occupational therapists to offer both physical and psychological assessments, helping to refer patients to the right treatment and rehabilitation service.

Whether you think you have Long COVID or have been formally diagnosed by a medical professional, it is also essential that you don't keep it to yourself. Let your employer know as they may be able to help and support you on your road to recovery.

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Workplace adjustments

Whether you're still suffering from Long COVID or your symptoms are easing after a lengthy period of time, your employer can work with you to consider any reasonable adjustments.

Should the lasting and debilitating symptoms of Long COVID mean you are off on long-term sickness leave, when you are ready to return to the office, ask your employer or HR department for a return-to-work interview. You can then raise concerns, talk about a possible phased return and review your current workload and tasks to help prevent a relapse further down the line.



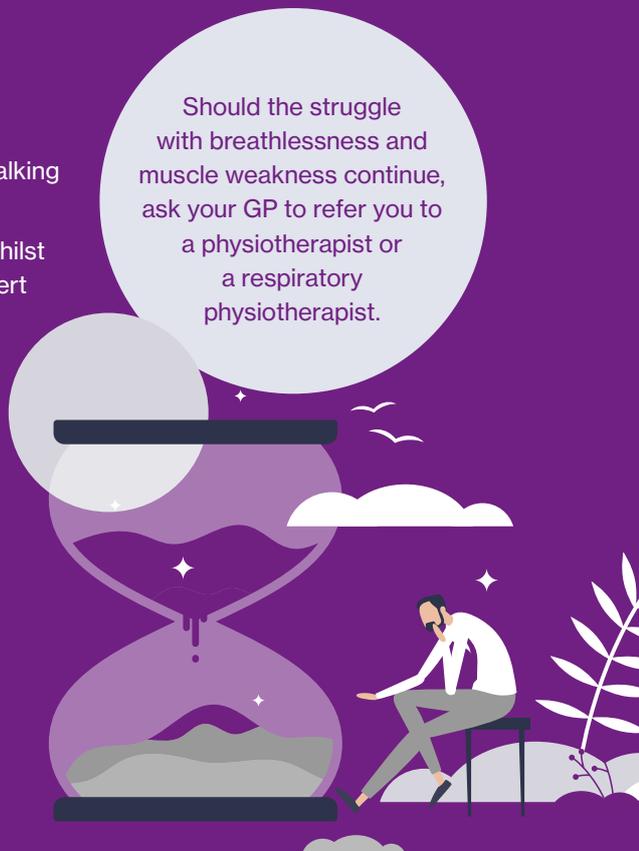
Pace yourself

Breathlessness and fatigue are key symptoms of Long COVID and even walking upstairs may be hard for some sufferers.

It is important to remember that recovery is a marathon not a sprint, and whilst physical activity is imperative for a healthy lifestyle, it is vital not to over-exert yourself when suffering from Long COVID. Instead, pace yourself, breaking down activities into manageable chunks and taking frequent rests.

The British Heart Foundation advises not to give up exercise altogether, however. If you stop using your muscles, they will become weaker, which in turn can make you more breathless when you use them – creating a vicious cycle. Exercise will also help boost your mental wellbeing through the release of endorphins.

Try to go for a short lunchtime walk or do exercises like resistance training or yoga to help strengthen muscles and improve your heart and lung function. If these exercises still feel too much, the British Lung Foundation recommends exercising whilst in bed, moving your legs, circling your ankles and punching your arms up in the air and out in front of you.



Should the struggle with breathlessness and muscle weakness continue, ask your GP to refer you to a physiotherapist or a respiratory physiotherapist.

Stay healthy

Your body needs the right foods, such as fruit, vegetables and protein, to promote healing, increase energy levels and boost your immune system.

Alcohol also has a negative effect on immunity and, according to DrinkAware, can make you more vulnerable to both contracting COVID-19 and suffering from its consequences, so try to cut back on consumption.

It is important to have a healthy, balanced diet when recovering from any illness.



You aren't alone

Having a long-term illness can impact on our mental health, with feelings of isolation and loneliness a common occurrence. But help is out there.

A Long COVID support group has been set up to help people struggling to recover from COVID-19, with resources such as a Facebook group where you can get help and advice from others in the same situation.

It is also worth checking to see if your company has an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) in place to help you cope with the psychological impact of Long COVID. Most EAPs offer 24/7 access to qualified and experienced counsellors, giving you the opportunity to discuss issues in complete confidence.



Other ways you can improve your mental health include:

-  **Mindfulness training**
-  **Getting a good sleep routine**
-  **Avoiding alcohol**
-  **Hobbies and activities you enjoyed before contracting Long COVID**
-  **Talking to friends and family**

Always remember, if you are struggling with your mental health, seek help from your GP as they will be able to provide the treatment you need to set you on the road to recovery.



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Sources

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[National Institutes for Health Research](#)

[ONS](#)

[FAIR Health](#)

[King's College London](#)

[British Heart Foundation](#)

[British Lung Foundation](#)

[Drinkaware](#)