

Long COVID – Information For Patients

“Long COVID” includes symptoms that start or linger after a COVID-19 infection and last at least 2 months. It also includes serious health problems that begin after a COVID-19 infection.

Risks

Anyone who has had COVID-19 can develop Long COVID, but it may be more likely in people who have not had a COVID-19 vaccine, people who have severe COVID-19, females, and people with other health conditions. The risk of developing new health problems may increase with each COVID-19 infection.



In a **Canadian study**, nearly 15% of adults who had a previous COVID-19 infection noticed symptoms that lasted at least 3 months. More than 20% of these people said their symptoms often or always limited their daily activities.

Symptoms

More than 200 symptoms and health problems affecting every part of the body have been reported after COVID-19 infections.

Long COVID symptoms can range from mild to severe and they can last for months or years.



Common symptoms of Long COVID include:

- Tiredness
- Concentration and memory problems
- Shortness of breath or cough
- Sleep problems
- Heart racing or irregular heartbeat (“palpitations”)
- Lightheadedness with standing
- Depressed mood and anxiety

Long COVID symptoms may improve with home-management strategies, including:

- For **tiredness, including after activity**, rest and pacing yourself are important. Exercise may make your symptoms worse.
- For **concentration and memory problems**, rest and pacing yourself are important. Try making lists and setting reminders.
- For **shortness of breath**, breathing techniques may help.
- For **sleep problems**, avoid caffeine late in the day, limit alcohol intake, try not to nap during the day, and work on a sleep routine.
- For **heart racing and dizziness**, fluids, compression stockings, increasing your salt intake, or medications may help. Speak with your family doctor or other healthcare professional.



Find more advice about managing common Long COVID-19 symptoms here:
www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk/i-think-i-have-long-covid

Ontario College of
Family Physicians



Tests and Treatments

There are no specific tests to diagnose Long COVID.

Depending on your symptoms, your family doctor or nurse practitioner (NP) might recommend a physical examination, blood tests, or other investigations. These could help rule out other causes of your symptoms.

Long COVID may be treated by your family doctor or NP, specialists and/or allied healthcare professionals, such as physiotherapists. There are some Long COVID clinics but they may not be available to everyone with Long COVID.

If you are diagnosed with a new health condition, like a blood clot, heart disease, or diabetes, you can receive the treatments you need for that condition.

Researchers are studying treatments for Long COVID. Right now, **treatments focus on relieving your symptoms and improving your ability to function.** Depending on your symptoms and the services available in your area, your family doctor or NP might recommend a rehab program to improve function.

Call your family doctor if:

- Your COVID-19 symptoms last longer than a month and you are having trouble returning to your regular activities.
- You notice new and bothersome symptoms.

Call 9-1-1 or go to the emergency department if you are:

- Severely short of breath (struggling for each breath, only able to speak single words)
- Having severe chest pain
- Unusually confused
- Losing consciousness



Not sure what to do? You can use **Health Connect Ontario** or **call 8-1-1** to speak with a nurse. These services are available 24/7.

Income Supports

If you are unable to work because of Long COVID and need support, you may qualify for certain income and employment support programs. Use the **Benefits Wayfinder** tool to learn more: <https://benefitswayfinder.org>

Avoiding COVID-19 is the Best Way to Prevent Long COVID

Use as many strategies to avoid COVID-19 as you can, as often as you can.

- Wear a high-quality and well-fitting mask in crowded indoor spaces.
- Breathe clean air. Gather outside when you can. Improve indoor air by opening windows, keep the furnace fan “on” and use air filters.
- Use Rapid Antigen Tests before gathering. Get a good sample by swabbing your cheeks, throat, and nostrils. Find instructions here: <https://rb.gy/sagijd>.
- Stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccine doses.

