



Long COVID
Facts, figures and management

Introduction

COVID-19 has profoundly changed the nature of medical work and remains with us not only because of its prevalence, but also through long-term effects on our patients. There are some national studies, but comprehensive international studies are still to be made. Despite many unknowns, here is basic long COVID information in a nutshell: its definition, frequency, duration, symptoms and essential monitoring.

What is long COVID?

Long COVID is individual or multiple signs and symptoms that continue or develop after acute COVID-19. The term includes ongoing symptomatic COVID-19 (from 4 to 12 weeks) as well as post-COVID-19 syndrome (12 weeks or more). [1]



How frequent is it?

- Expected UK prevalence of post-COVID symptoms: around one-third of cases of the entire COVID-19 population. [2,8]
- According to studies in different countries, 8-27% of children suffer from persistent symptoms. [3]

How long does it last?

- Hospitalised patients in Italy: 32.6% experience problems after 60 days. [4,8]
- Hospitalised patients in France: two-thirds experience problems after 60 days. [5,8]
- UK study of people entering health data into a phone app: 22.1% report problems after 5 weeks, and 9.9% after 12 weeks. [6,8]
- According to a German study, only 22.9% of patients are fully symptom-free at month 12. [7]

What are the signs and symptoms? ^[8]



FATIGUE

severe, persists after rest, somewhat similar to chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS)

BREATHLESSNESS

frequent pathological pulmonary function tests of lung function after hospital discharge. The lung function improves slowly. Prolonged breathlessness is usually not accompanied by any organ changes

HEART-RELATED SYMPTOMS

signs of myocarditis, chest pain (can be connected with myocardial damage), symptoms of postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome (POTS)

CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM-RELATED SYMPTOMS

loss of taste or smell; cognitive disorders (brain fog, concentration problems, memory disorders); sleep disorders; anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder; symptoms of Alzheimer's (possible onset or worsening investigated); symptoms of Guillain-Barre syndrome (weakness and tingling in limbs); dizziness; balance problems

THROMBOEMBOLIC EVENTS ^[9, 13]

The frequency of thromboembolic events after COVID-19 is <5% (0-3.7 in 30 days). How long patients remain hypercoagulable after acute COVID-19 is unknown. Symptoms: limb aches and cramps

NON-SPECIFIC SYMPTOMS

What is the pathogenesis?

Permanent damage caused to the lungs, brain, heart and other organs is suspected. The development of autoantibodies is also being researched as a cause. [10]

Does the severity of acute COVID play a role?

The onset of more than five symptoms in the first week of acute COVID-19 is significant regardless of gender or age. [11] However, the acute phase can also be moderate or mild and/or there can be a period of temporary recovery. [10]

What should be monitored at primary care level?

While considering the known comorbidities, the following monitorings are recommended for basic diagnostics: [9, 12]

- temperature; heart rate and rhythm; blood pressure; respiratory examination; functional status; pulse oximetry
- clinical testing (if necessary): full blood count; electrolytes; liver and renal function; troponin; C reactive protein; creatine kinase; D-dimer; brain natriuretic peptides; ferritin
- other investigations: chest x-ray; urine tests; ECG
- screening questions: pain, breathlessness, fatigue, physical exhaustion, post-exertional malaise, cognitive disorders, depression, anxiety

What are the risk factors? [10]

- Advanced age
- Excessive body weight
- Being female
- More than five symptoms in the first week of illness
- Asthma

Why is monitoring essential?

Long COVID can consist of clusters of symptoms, which often overlap. They can change over time and affect any system in the body. [10] Individual symptoms can last for different time periods. Their monitoring is vital to establish how long they last and when they end. [4]

Making your work easier with long COVID patient questionnaire sheet

Please also refer to our long COVID patient sheet. It contains basic long COVID information as well as a questionnaire and a measurement checklist.

[DOWNLOAD QUESTIONNAIRE](#)

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