

Long COVID Fact Sheet

What is Long COVID?

Long COVID is defined as wide array of symptoms that present after conducting the SARS-CoV-2 infection that negatively influence daily function.^{1,2} These symptoms may develop during or after the active COVID-19 infection and may even intermittently relapse and remit.² Symptoms can include fatigue, shortness of breath, chest pain, sleep problems, headache, depression, anxiety, and digestive complaints.^{1,2}

Long COVID and Mental Health

Although there are many symptoms associated with Long COVID, the core symptoms are fatigue, dyspnea, and cognitive dysfunction.³ In addition, sleep disorders, depression, post-traumatic stress disorders, and anxiety have an increased incidence with Long COVID.^{3,5} There is emerging evidence that Long COVID fatigue is associated with cognitive and neuropsychiatric symptoms.⁴

Who is at Risk?

It is estimated that 43% of individuals who have been infected with COVID-19 experience Long COVID symptoms.⁵ Risk factors for experiencing Long COVID symptoms include: female sex, pre-existing asthma, older age, obesity, other comorbidities, and more severe COVID-19 symptoms during infection.⁵ When we look specifically at mental health and Long COVID, a large survey study showed those who experience high symptom COVID-19, fatigue, tiredness, and sleep problems during the acute COVID-19 infection were more likely to develop a mental health condition during the recovery.⁶ This suggests that psychological complaints during the acute COVID-19 infection may serve as a risk factor and warrant early psychological interventions.⁶

Examination of Long COVID

Due to the wide breadth and complexity of Long COVID, an examination protocol is not yet established.⁷ Instead, examination should focus on each patient's individual complaints.⁷ The musculoskeletal, neurological, cardiopulmonary, and psychological systems should be screened in addition to fatigue and sleep complaints.^{1,2,7}

Intervention and Prognosis

Since each Long COVID case is unique, interventions should be specific and individualized to meet the needs and goals of each patient.^{7,8} Exercise may benefit some patients while it may exacerbate others, but in either case an emphasis on a general, functional level of intensity is pertinent to avoid overexertion and further fatigue.⁸ Aerobic exercise, balance training, resistance exercise, ADL training,

and thorough patient education are interventions that can be utilized as indicated to improve fatigue, quality of life, anxiety, shortness of breath, and safety.^{7,8} With current evidence there are no definitive interventions or prognosis for Long COVID.⁷ All assessments and interventions should continue to be patient centered, individualized, and multifaceted in order to best medically manage symptoms of Long COVID.^{2,4,5,7,8}

References

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