

What Is Long COVID?

Long COVID is the term currently used for people who have signs and symptoms that develop during or after COVID-19 infection that continue for at least three months and are not explained by another diagnosis. This is a new and emerging condition that can have a significant effect on people's quality of life. Long COVID is not contagious and is your body responding beyond the initial illness.

The development of Long COVID does not seem linked to how severe the initial illness was or what types of treatments were taken during this time. Vaccinated people can still develop Long COVID. Children may also be susceptible to Long COVID, however most studies have found that children recover more quickly from their COVID-19 symptoms than adult patients. The rate of recovery varies between individuals with current evidence suggesting most people will recover from Long COVID over time.

What are the symptoms of Long COVID?

There are a range of different experiences with Long COVID – some people may have only a few symptoms while other people have many symptoms at the one time. It usually presents with clusters of symptoms, often overlapping, which can fluctuate and change over time and can affect any system in the body.

Long COVID symptoms can include:

- Shortness of breath
- Cough
- Fatigue/exhaustion
- Concentration/memory issues
- Changes in mood – anxiety, depression, stress, feelings of guilt
- Loss of smell or taste
- Headache
- Sleep issues
- Heart pounding/palpitations/racing heart/chest pain
- Dizziness
- Skin rashes
- Muscle aches and joint pains
- Worsened symptoms after physical or mental activities

Long COVID is a health issue that we are still collecting further information and reports about, hence this list of symptoms may not include every symptom that may be experienced. It is also important to consider that some symptoms may have other causes besides Long COVID. There is no test to diagnose Long COVID – your healthcare provider will consider a diagnosis based on your full health assessment to rule out other medical conditions.

What should I do if I am concerned I may have Long COVID?

Make an appointment with your General Practitioner (GP) to discuss Long COVID. They will be able to look for other conditions and answer your questions. There may be specific supports that can assist your symptoms as well as referrals if you need ongoing help. Your GP will also monitor your symptoms and can help you with decisions around returning to work and other activities.

What treatments are available for Long COVID?

There are no specific treatments for Long COVID – the current management approach is aimed at alleviating symptoms to allow a gradual return to full health. Your GP will consider all of the treatment options that are best to manage your symptoms and ongoing care during this time. Whilst most people are able to self-manage the symptoms of Long COVID at home, your GP may recommend the addition of specific services to match the level of your needs. This may include allied health assistance, and/or mental health support.

While the symptoms of Long COVID can range in intensity, it is not often that hospitalisation is required. There are no special treatments or therapies available in hospital for Long COVID that can contribute to an earlier resolution of symptoms. There is ongoing research to build the evidence base to assist in the ongoing care and management of this new condition.

Seeking help

People with experience of Long COVID have highlighted that one of the most important issues around the long-term effects of COVID-19 is the uncertainty around how long it will take to completely recover and who to seek help from for support during this time. Patients have reported experiencing fear and anxiety because they have had their symptoms dismissed when seeking help, or not known where to go to receive the best health care.

As well as information and support from your GP there are additional resources in the community including online resources.

The Victorian Department of Health has specific information regarding Long COVID, visit www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au

Your local council may have resources and services that can help such as allied health services (e.g. physiotherapy), assistance with getting food and essentials, as well as counselling and mental health services.

Seek further help if you:

- Feel very short of breath
- Are too short of breath to manage essential activities (such as getting around the house, eating, going to the toilet, sleeping)
- Become dizzy when you stand
- Become confused or drowsy
- Are not managing at home
- Otherwise have worsening symptoms

Want to know more?

- Contact the COVID hotline on **1800 675 398**
- Visit the Victorian Department of Health COVID-19 website: www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au
- Talk to your local doctor or healthcare professional