

Long COVID and mental health

This factsheet gives information on long COVID and mental health. It explains the symptoms, treatments, and ways to manage the condition. This information is for adults in England who live with long COVID. It is also for their loved ones and carers and anyone interested in the topic.

Key Points.

- Long COVID is an illness you can develop after getting COVID. It can affect your physical and mental health.
- The symptoms of COVID are usually mild and pass quickly. But if they last weeks or months this is known as long COVID.
- Your GP can refer you to appropriate services. They can give you tests, treat your symptoms, and give support for your mental and physical health.
- You can help manage your symptoms by looking after your physical wellbeing. And getting help for your mental health if you need it.
- You might be a carer with long COVID, or support someone with long COVID. You can get support from carer's services.

This factsheet covers:

1. [What is long COVID and what are the symptoms?](#)
2. [What can I do if I think I have long COVID?](#)
3. [Can long COVID affect my mental health?](#)
4. [What help and support can I get for my mental health?](#)
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6. [What can I do if I need urgent help for my mental health?](#)
7. [A relative or friend has long COVID. What can I do?](#)
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1. What is long COVID and what are the symptoms?

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is an infectious respiratory illness. A respiratory illness is one that affects your lungs and airways.

Most people with COVID will have mild to moderate symptoms. They will recover without needing special treatment. But some people will become more ill and need specialist medical attention.¹

What is long COVID?

For most people, the symptoms of COVID-19 will pass within a few days or weeks. But for some people the effects can last for weeks or months. This condition is called long COVID or COVID-19 syndrome.²

Long COVID is a new condition which is still being studied.³

What are the symptoms of long COVID?

People experiencing long COVID may often experience one or more of the following symptoms.⁴

- Extreme tiredness
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain or tightness
- Problems with memory and concentration
- Difficulty sleeping
- Feelings of having a fast-beating, fluttering or pounding heart
- Dizziness
- Pins and needles or joint pain
- Depression and anxiety
- Tinnitus or earache
- Feeling sick, diarrhoea, stomach aches, loss of appetite
- A high temperature, cough, headaches, sore throat,
- Changes to sense of smell or taste
- Rashes

The type of symptoms you have might change over time. The way they affect you

Everyone's experience of long COVID is different. Some people only have one symptom, but others might have many. How bad your symptoms are can vary.

Long COVID can affect your mental health. See [section 3](#) of this factsheet for more information.

What are the chances of getting long COVID?

The chances of getting long COVID do not seem to be linked to how ill you were when you first had COVID-19.⁵ This is what the NHS say.

2. What can I do if I think I have long COVID?

Your symptoms of COVID-19 might have lasted for longer than 4 weeks. If you are worried or want expert advice, you can:

- contact your GP, or
- call NHS 111 or contact them through their website at <https://111.nhs.uk>

You will be asked about your symptoms and the impact they are having on your life.

You might be offered:⁶

- tests, like blood tests or chest x-rays,
- treatment for your symptoms,
- advice about how to manage your symptoms at home,
- a referral to an NHS long COVID assessment service, or
- an NHS service that specialises in the specific symptoms you have.

Medical professionals will think about if your symptoms are linked to other conditions or illnesses.

You can check what treatment and care is recommended for long COVID. You can do this on the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) website:

www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng188/chapter/1-Identification

NICE produce guidelines for how health professionals should treat certain conditions. The NHS does not have to follow NICE guidelines. But they should have a good reason if they do not.

3. Can long COVID affect my mental health?

Physical health conditions can often affect your mental health too, and this is true of long COVID. It might lead to things like symptoms of anxiety or low mood.

Some studies show that about 1 in 4 people who experience long COVID develop a mental health issue.⁷

Long COVID might affect things like your quality of life or ability to work.

Many people are anxious about how long symptoms might last or when they can get back to their normal way of life.

If long COVID is affecting your mental health, there are things that can help.

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4. What help and support can I get for my mental health?

How can my GP support me?

You can contact your GP, who can provide treatment and advice for mental health issues.

Your GP can:

- offer you suitable medication,
- refer you to NHS talking therapy services,
- give you lifestyle advice on things like sleep or exercise,
- refer them to a link worker, and
- refer you to specialist NHS mental health services, if appropriate.

You can find out more about '**GPs and your mental health**' at www.rethink.org. Or you can call our General Enquiries Team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

Can I get talking therapy?

Talking therapy is a common treatment for mental illness. It includes things like counselling and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). But there are other types too.

You can get free talking therapy from the NHS or you can pay for private therapy. Sometimes you can get free or low-cost therapy from charities or other organisations.

You can find your local **NHS talking therapy service** here: www.nhs.uk/service-search/mental-health/find-an-NHS-talking-therapies-service

You can usually book your first appointment on your local service's website or by giving them a call. You do not normally need a referral from your GP.

You can find out more about '**Talking therapies**' at www.rethink.org. Or you can call our General Enquiries Team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

5. What can I do to help myself?

There are things that you can do to help yourself. Everyone is different, so you can find out what works for you.

How can I get emotional support?

Talking about your mental health can have big benefits. You may be able to talk to trusted people, like friends and family, about how you're feeling. But you can also call emotional support lines. Trained listeners are there to help you talk through how you are feeling.

You can get contact details for emotional support lines in our information on '**Worried about your mental health - How to get treatment and support**' at www.rethink.org. Or you can call our General Enquiries Team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

What else can I do to help myself?

You can also.

- Learn ways to relax.
- Practise mindfulness and meditation.
- Improve things about your lifestyle such as your diet, sleep and exercise.
- Have a daily routine.
- Have healthy relationships.
- Keep a mood diary.
- Try complementary and alternative treatments.
- Get self-help online.

Join a mental health support group, either face-to-face or online. You can search to see if we run a support group near you here: www.rethink.org/help-in-your-area/support-groups

You can read more about the above things in our information on:

- Worried about your mental health - How to get treatment and support, and
- Complementary and alternative treatments for mental health

at www.rethink.org. Or you can call our General Enquiries Team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

6. What can I do if I need urgent help for my mental health?

You might need urgent help for your mental health. You can find information about options for help by going to www.rethink.org and clicking on the 'Get help now' link.

You can contact your local **NHS urgent mental health helpline**. You can find details of your local helpline at: www.nhs.uk/service-search/mental-health/find-an-urgent-mental-health-helpline. Or you can call NHS 111 to ask them for details.

You can find out more about:

- Suicidal thoughts – How to cope, and
- Self-harm

at www.rethink.org. Or you can call our General Enquiries Team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

7. A relative or friend has long COVID. What can I do?

If a relative or friend has long COVID it may be a stressful and challenging time for both of you.

You might:

- be worried about your relative or friend's mental health, or
- want to know how to support them if they are experiencing mental illness.

You can find out more about:

- Worried about someone's mental health, and
- Supporting someone with a mental illness

at www.rethink.org. Or you can call our General Enquiries Team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

8. I am finding it difficult to care for my relative because I have long COVID. What can I do?

You might care for a relative who lives with mental illness. But you might have long COVID and because of that you are finding it difficult to care for them.

You can.

- Ask another relative, a friend or a neighbour of yours or your relative to help them, if possible.
- If you are in a carers group, you can ask another member of the group to help.
- If your relative is with an NHS mental health team you, or your relative can contact them. They might be able to arrange additional support, including support from social services.
- If your relative is not with an NHS mental health team you can ask for help from social services. They might be able to support you as a carer or support your relative directly. Or help both of you.

You read our information on:

- Social care assessment - Under the Care Act 2014
- Carers assessment - Under the Care Act 2014
- Planning for the future - Your relative's care and support

at www.rethink.org. Or you can call our General Enquiries Team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

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Useful Contacts

Carers UK

Carers UK run an advice line, offer online support, and carers groups throughout the UK.

Phone: 0808 808 7777

Address: 20 Great Dover Street, London SE1 4LX

Email: advice@carersuk.org

Website: www.carersuk.org

Carers Trust

This charity gives practical advice about caring for someone.

Phone: 0300 772 9600

Address: 2-6 Boundary Row, London SE1 8HP

Email: info@carers.org

Website: www.carers.org

Broken links?

All links to other pages on our website, and other websites, worked when we last reviewed this page. If you notice that any links no longer work, you can help us by emailing us at feedback@rethink.org and we will fix them. Many thanks.

References

Incorrect information?

All the information in this factsheet was correct, to the best of our knowledge, when we published it. If you think any information is incorrect you can help us by emailing us at feedback@rethink.org. Many thanks.

¹ World Health Organisation. *Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) – Overview*. See paras 1 & 2.

https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1 (accessed 24 January 2024).

² NHS. *Long-term effects of COVID-19 (long COVID) - What is long COVID?*

www.nhs.uk/conditions/covid-19/long-term-effects-of-covid-19-long-covid/#:~:text=What%20is%20long%20COVID%3F,which%20is%20still%20being%20studied (accessed 24 January 2024).

³ NHS. *Long-term effects of COVID-19 (long COVID) - What is long COVID?*

www.nhs.uk/conditions/covid-19/long-term-effects-of-covid-19-long-covid/#:~:text=What%20is%20long%20COVID%3F,which%20is%20still%20being%20studied (accessed 24 January 2024).

⁴ NHS. *Long-term effects of COVID-19 (long COVID) - What is long COVID?*

www.nhs.uk/conditions/covid-19/long-term-effects-of-covid-19-long-covid/#:~:text=What%20is%20long%20COVID%3F,which%20is%20still%20being%20studied (accessed 24 January 2024).

⁵ NHS. *Long-term effects of COVID-19 (long COVID) - What is long COVID?* See 'How

long does it take to recover from COVID 19?' www.nhs.uk/conditions/covid-19/long-term-effects-of-covid-19-long-covid/#:~:text=What%20is%20long%20COVID%3F,which%20is%20still%20being%20studied (accessed 24 January 2024).

⁶ NICE. *COVID-19 rapid guideline: managing the long-term effects of COVID-19*

www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng188/chapter/3-Investigations-and-referral (accessed 5 March 2024).

⁷ Goodman, M. L., Molldrem, S., Elliott, A., Robertson, D., & Keiser, P. Long COVID and mental health correlates: a new chronic condition fits existing patterns. *Health psychology and behavioral medicine* 2023; Volume 11(1). doi:10.1080/21642850.2022.2164498 (accessed 5 March 2023).

This factsheet is available in large print.

Rethink Mental Illness Advice Service

Phone 0808 801 0525

**Monday to Friday, 9:30am to 4pm
(excluding bank holidays)**

 Email a [\[redacted\]](mailto:feedback@rethink.org)

Did this help?

We'd love to know if this information helped you

Drop us a line at: feedback@rethink.org

or write to us at Rethink Mental Illness:

RAIS
PO Box 18252
Solihull
B91 9BA

or call us on 0808 801 0525

We're open 9:30am to 4pm

Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays)



Equality, rights, fair treatment, and the maximum quality of life for all those severely affected by mental illness.

For further information on Rethink Mental Illness Phone 0121 522 7007
Email info@rethink.org



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