



Getting help for Long COVID

What is Long COVID?

Most people with COVID-19 will recover completely within a few weeks. However, some people may continue to experience symptoms for weeks or months after their diagnosis. A person is considered to have:

- 'Ongoing symptomatic COVID-19' if their symptoms have persisted for more than 4 weeks after initial infection.
- 'Post-COVID-19 syndrome' if their symptoms continue after 12 weeks.

The term 'long COVID' usually refers to both stages, but there are currently no agreed diagnostic criteria. Early research in Australia estimates that 20% of people with COVID-19 still experience symptoms after one month, and 5% after three months.¹ Researchers are still working to understand how many people might develop long COVID in Australia, and whether different COVID variants affect the risk of developing it.

Long COVID can affect people who initially had mild illness which was managed at home as well as those who had a hospital admission. Some people are at increased risk of developing Long COVID including those who are over 35 years of age, female, have some pre-existing conditions such as diabetes, or had severe illness during their COVID-19 infection.

Emerging evidence suggests that COVID-19 vaccination reduces the likelihood of developing long COVID, and that long COVID may also be less likely in people infected with the Omicron COVID-19 variant, compared with earlier variants.²

How can I tell if I have long COVID?

People with long COVID can display one or many signs and symptoms –. Common symptoms include:

- Fatigue
- Shortness of breath
- Changes in smell or taste
- Chest pain
- Difficulty sleeping
- Anxiety or depression
- Headache
- Cognitive dysfunction

As the symptoms of long COVID are so varied, treatment plans need a personalised approach and may need support from a range of health professionals. It is important that you schedule an appointment with your GP to discuss your symptoms, rule out any other possible causes, and discuss treatment options.

If you, or one of your loved ones, have any of the following symptoms, **call emergency services on 000 immediately** and tell the phone operator you've previously been diagnosed with COVID-19:

- Severe shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Severe chest pain or pressure
- Worsening ability to concentrate and increased confusion
- Difficulty waking up

What support will I need to manage my symptoms?

If you have ongoing symptoms after COVID-19 diagnosis, schedule regular appointments with your GP to discuss how best to manage them. Your GP will be able to assess your symptoms and, if needed, provide referrals to medical specialists, allied health professionals and/or multidisciplinary clinics. Depending on your symptoms, this may include referrals to one or several health professionals, such as:

- Respiratory doctors to investigate and manage breathing difficulties, and rule out other lung diseases
- Cardiologists to investigate and manage chest pain, and rule out other causes
- Physiotherapists and exercise physiologists to support gradual commencement or return to exercise
- Occupational Therapists for modifications and treatment to support returning to your daily activities and improved cognitive function
- Dietitians to support improving appetite, managing gastrointestinal symptoms, taste or smell changes, and malnutrition
- Speech pathologists to support improving chronic cough, hoarse voice or difficulty swallowing
- Psychologists to support your mental health and wellbeing

Your GP will also be able to support you with self-management strategies for your symptoms, and any medicines that might be needed. It is important that if completing daily tasks and activities (such as cooking, dressing and showering yourself) is unmanageable, you maintain regular contact with your GP.

Long COVID clinics

Local services may be available in your state or territory. Check the website for your local health department to find services:

- **ACT:** [Post-COVID Recovery Clinic](#)
- **NSW:** [Long COVID and post-COVID-19 condition](#)
- **NT:** [Long COVID or post-COVID conditions](#)
- **QLD:** [Long COVID](#)
- **SA:** [Long COVID](#)
- **TAS:** [Post COVID-19 condition \(Long COVID\)](#)
- **VIC:** [Long COVID](#)
- **WA:** [COVID-19 Coronavirus: Managing COVID-19](#)

Further information

- [RACGP - Caring for patients with post-COVID-19 conditions](#)
- [National Clinical Evidence Taskforce Care of people after COVID-19 flowchart](#)
- [Healthdirect Understanding Long COVID](#)

References

1. Liu B, Jayasundara D, Pye V, Dobbins T, Gore GJ, Matthews G, et al. Whole of population-based cohort study of recovery time from COVID-19 in New South Wales Australia. *Lancet Reg Health West Pac.* 2021;12(100193).
2. Antonelli M, Pujol JC, Spector TD, Ourselin S & Steves CJ. Risk of long COVID associated with delta versus omicron variants of SARS-CoV-2. *The Lancet.* 2022;399(10343):2263-2264