

POST COVID CONDITIONS

What is Post-Covid Conditions?

Most people with COVID will make a full recovery within a few weeks. But some people, even those with mild illness, still experience symptoms after recovery. These health problems are called Post-COVID conditions.

34 FPSB students have been infected

According to FPSB Covid-19 Task Force team's data, there have been 34 FPSB students who have been infected with COVID per July 2021

How to Prevent

The best way to prevent this condition is by getting COVID-19 vaccination and also living a healthy lifestyle

Post-Covid Symptoms

- Fatigue
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Cough
- Joint pain
- Chest pain
- Memory, concentration or sleep problems
- Muscle pain or headache
- Fast or pounding heartbeat
- Loss of smell or taste
- Depression or anxiety
- Fever
- Dizziness when you stand
- Worsened symptoms after physical or mental activities

How to appease the symptoms

- Have a lot of rest
- Elevate your head to your chest a little while sleeping
- Warm compresses the uncomfortable chest and forehead
- Limit staring at your gadgets
- Eat less foods that contain a lot of gas
- Do exercise
- Don't smoke
- Don't take medicine carelessly
- Make yourself calm, and don't be too anxious or panic

COVID-19

Early lockdown studies found that

- up to 45% of adults felt adverse effects on mental health,
- up to 37% showed signs of psychological distress and
- up to 70% felt this period was the most stressful of their careers.

Employers will need to manage the psychological effects of the lockdowns on their workers as they return to office/factory

low morale, hyper-stress, general fear



'Habits affect Post-COVID-19 syndrome'

NADIRA GUNATILLEKE

Here are the excerpts from an exclusive interview conducted with Consultant Community Physician - RDHS Hambantota, Dr. Amila Chandrasiri about the post-COVID-19 syndrome.

Q - The most number of patients who are infected with COVID-19 complains of some difficulties even after they recover. Why does this happen?

A - Yes, for some people, COVID-19 infection triggers some physical and psychological difficulties that last for weeks or months even after the infection is over. This is known as Post-COVID Syndrome (PCS). This can happen even if the illness is mild, or if they have no initial symptoms. But this can be really debilitating for some patients.

Q - Can you elaborate more about PCS?

A - Yes. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines PCS as a collection of non-specific symptoms predominated by general tiredness, respiratory difficulties, body aches and mental problems.

They often complain of headaches, muscle pains, joint pains and abdominal pains. They become easily fatigued. Most of these patients complain of persistent cough and chest tightness. These symptoms usually get worse after physical activities. They also complain of pins-and-needles feeling in hands and feet. Most of these symptoms are non-specific.

Q - What are the psychological consequences of PCS?

A - PCS can be associated with memory decline and psychological problems. These patients often complain of forgetfulness, poor sleep and find it difficult to concentrate on work. In severe cases, these patients can develop depression which is characterised by extreme sadness and lack of enjoyment.

Q - So, PCS is a collection of vague symptoms?

A - Yes, exactly. Usually, these symptoms cannot be attributed to any other cause and cannot be explained by an alternative diagnosis. This should appear within three months from the onset of infection. Symptoms may be new onset following initial recovery from an acute COVID-19 episode or persist from the initial illness.

However, symptoms may also fluctuate or relapse over time. Medical experts call PCS an emerging public health threat.

Q - How common is PCS?

A - As this is an emerging situation, we still don't have actual statistics. But a recent study in the USA found that one-third of COVID-19 patients reported any kind of persistent symptom after three months of infection. So, this is a large number. This study also revealed that PCS is more common among adults and the elderly than children and adolescents.

Q - Can PCS lead to any organ damage?

A - Yes, some patients can get persisting organ damage following COVID-19 infection. We know that it mainly attacks the lungs. In some patients, lungs get scarred due to the infection and the patient ends up with poor respiratory capacity. COVID-19 infection can also affect the heart, liver, kidneys and brain.

The formation of blood clots which leads to heart attacks and strokes can be a rare but devastating complication.

Q - Why did you call PCS an emerging public health threat?

A - These symptoms may cause a significant impact on the continuous functioning of infected individuals. So, this can affect the working population and impair the income generation of individuals and families. They cannot do heavy work. Daily-paid labourers become helpless. Office workers and other professionals can also get repercussions as PCS affects the cognitive functioning of patients. If PCS affects a child or adolescent, that can severely disrupt their education. Because these children cannot concentrate and may easily forget things. However, much is still unknown about how COVID-19 affects people over time and more research are needed to understand the actual issue.

Q - What leads to PCS?

A - The exact pathological process which leads to PCS is still not known. Actually, we do not have enough evidence to predict who gets and who does not. Anyone with COVID-19 can get a post-COVID-19 condition, irrespective of the severity of the disease. But we see that the patients who do not get the required doses of vaccines and those who smoke and consume alcohol develop PCS more than others. So, this is a good lesson for all of us.

Q - Is there a way that we can prevent the occurrence of PCS?

A - The best way is to prevent the infection of COVID-19. That is why we always advise people to adhere to safety measures though the vaccine is taken. Some people think it is okay to contract COVID-19 as the vaccine controls the severity of the disease. But PCS is not so good for many. So, I urge people to adhere to key safety measures such as regular use of face masks, maintenance of hand hygiene, keeping adequate distance and avoiding non-essential public gatherings. We have evidence to show that having a vaccine minimises the risk of PCS. So, all eligible individuals must obtain the booster dose as soon as possible. Having proper nutrition, adequate rest and sleep will also reduce the risk and minimise the severity of symptoms. All infected patients should follow these instructions to minimise the risk of PCS.

Q - How can we treat a patient with PCS?

A - Basically, we initiate symptomatic management to relieve pain and psychological distress. So, doctors prescribe a short course of pain killers and anxiolytic drugs. But, importantly, do not take any medicine without appropriate medical advice. Engaging in healthy practices is also important in managing PCS.

Q - Are there any behavioural practices which should be followed in order to control the occurrence of PCS?

A - Yes, of course. They play a significant role in managing PCS. It is important to have a balanced nutritional diet, take enough fluids and have good sleep. Avoiding smoking and alcohol is also important because they can aggravate the difficulties. It is important to return to usual physical activities gradually. Breathing exercises is greatly helpful in improving the lung's functioning. There are good YouTube videos explaining breathing exercises. We need to provide psychological support for those who are having cognitive and psychological issues. Relaxation techniques and mindfulness meditation are helpful in controlling mental exhaustion.

Q - Can you elaborate a little more about breathing exercises?

A - The "breathing control" technique is aimed at normalising breathing patterns and increasing the efficiency of the respiratory muscles resulting in less energy expenditure, reduced fatigue, and improvement in breathing difficulties. The patient should sit in a supported position and breath in and out slowly - breath in through the nose and breath out through the mouth, while relaxing the chest and shoulders and allowing the tummy to rise. They should aim for an inhalation to expiration ratio of 1:2. This technique can be used frequently throughout the day, in 5-10 minute bursts. You have to stay alert and be aware of your breathing. This will improve your mindfulness as well. This is a modern version of the Buddhist spiritual practice of 'Anapanasathi'.

Q - We see that these patients often visit many doctors and request blood tests and scans. Do they really need them?

A - That is understandable. Patients can easily become frustrated as they have symptoms which cannot be explained due to any particular illnesses. So, they might visit several doctors seeking medication. But you need to understand that it is the nature of PCS. However, as doctors, we always look for any underlying illness or complication which require medical attention. So your doctor might request for certain blood tests to exclude any significant complication. But after excluding any other illness or complication, we arrive at the diagnosis of PCS and reassure the patient.

Q - Do these patients require specialist care?

A - Yes, if the symptoms have a big impact on a patient, he or she may be referred to a specialist rehabilitation service or a service that specialises in the specific symptoms the patient has. But he or she should always see their family doctor (primary care doctor) first before self-deciding on referrals.



"In some patients, lungs get scarred due to the infection and the patient ends up with poor respiratory capacity. COVID-19 infection can also affect the heart, liver, kidneys and brain. The formation of blood clots which leads to heart attacks and strokes can be a rare but devastating complication."

A slow path to recovery

Britain, prevalence of symptoms among people testing positive for covid-19, %



Source: ONS Coronavirus Infection Survey

LONG COVID

POST COVID SYNDROME

GENERALISED • Fatigue • Pain • Fever

DEFINITIONS

Acute Covid-19

Signs and symptoms of Covid-19 for up to 4 weeks that remain.

Ongoing symptomatic Covid-19

Signs and symptoms of Covid-19 from 4 weeks up to 12 weeks.

Post-Covid syndrome (Long Covid)

Signs and symptoms that develop during or after Covid-19 infection, up to 12 weeks or more and are not explained by an alternative diagnosis.

Source: United Kingdom National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)

Psychological/psychiatric

- Depression symptoms
- Anxiety symptoms

Ear/nose/throat

- Tinnitus (ringing sound in the ear)
- Earache
- Sore throat
- Loss of taste and/or smell

Gastrointestinal

- Abdominal pain
- Nausea
- Diarrhea
- Anorexia and reduced appetite

Musculoskeletal

- Joint pain
- Muscle pain

Neurological

- Cognitive impairment (Brain fog, loss of concentration or memory loss)
- Headache
- Sleep disturbance
- Peripheral neuropathy symptoms
- Dizziness
- Delirium

Respiratory

- Breathlessness
- Cough

Cardiovascular

- Chest tightness
- Chest pain
- Palpitation

Dermatological

- Skin rashes

