

COVID LONG HAULERS

Occupational Therapy Strategies to Assist in Your Recovery

HOW CAN LONG HAULERS IMPACT ME?

A COVID Long Hauler refers to someone who, for unknown reasons, has not fully recovered 30 to 100(+) days post a COVID-19 diagnosis. You can be impacted by Long Haulers no matter if your case of COVID-19 was mild or severe, your age, your previous health or chronic illness, or whether you required hospitalization or recovered at home. It is not uncommon for symptoms to improve and then return at a later time.

Most common long hauler symptoms include:

- Fatigue/Shortness of breath
- Difficulty thinking and concentrating (sometimes referred to as "brain fog")
- Coughing
- Difficulty sleeping
- Depression/Anxiety
- Additional symptoms include: body aches, joint pain, chest pain, loss of taste and smell, headaches, inability to exercise, muscle pain, intermittent fever, fast-beating or pounding heart

REMEMBER:

1. Long haul COVID is common and has been identified as an actual condition. Symptoms can vary, and may come and go.
2. Long haul COVID can be successfully managed with time and intentionality.
3. Making healthy life decisions in every aspect can make your recovery easier. These include: taking your medications as prescribed, keeping all doctor's appointments, conserving your energy as best you can, leaning on your support system, ensuring good hydration, nutrition, rest and sleep hygiene, and stress management.



NORTHSIDE HOSPITAL
REHABILITATION SERVICES

If you need further assistance managing your COVID long hauler symptoms, please discuss a referral to Occupational Therapy with your physician.

Northside Hospital Rehabilitation Services are here to help.

Atlanta, Cherokee, Duluth, Forsyth and Gwinnett locations

Phone: 404-236-8030

Fax: 404-236-8051

ENERGY CONSERVATION | Techniques to Manage Fatigue

COVID Long Hauler can frequently leave you with ongoing fatigue and shortness of breath despite the amount you rest. The below strategies can help you manage these symptoms.

- **Pace Yourself:** Avoid doing too much too soon. Allow yourself enough time to complete the tasks without having to rush. Take rest breaks as needed, spread out tasks throughout the day, and do not schedule too many activities in one day.
- **Avoid Fatigue:** Sit to complete tasks when able. Include rest periods throughout the day, 5-10 minutes every hour. Do not wait until you are tired before you stop and rest. Keep chairs nearby so you can take seated rest breaks.
- **Plan ahead and be organized:** Gather all items you will need prior to starting a task, and keep needed items within reach.
- **Simplify Your Tasks and Set Realistic Goals:** Identify the activities that are most important to you. Do not think you have to do things the same way you have always done them. Ask for help and divide tasks among family and friends.
- **Consider Adaptive Equipment:** Use a shower chair or tub transfer bench if needed. Other helpful equipment suggestions



include a reacher, long-handled sponge, long-handled shoe horn, and sock aid. A rolling walker, rollator or a cane may be helpful to avoid falls and save energy.

COOKING & HOME MANAGEMENT

Preparing meals and taking care of your home can require a high amount of energy. Think about making changes to make these tasks more manageable.

COOKING: Prepare part of the meal ahead of time. Gather all necessary items before beginning. Sit to prepare the vegetables, mix ingredients and to wash dishes.

FOOD DELIVERY APPS: DoorDash, Uber Eats, Grubhub

CLEANING UP FOLLOWING MEAL TIME: Rest after meals before starting to clean up. Allow dishes to soak to eliminate scrubbing. Let your dishes air dry. Use paper plates.

GROCERY SHOPPING:

- Have groceries delivered: instacart.com, Walmart.com, amazon.com & shipt.com
- Curbside pick-up: Walmart, Target, Kroger, Publix, Aldi, Sam's Club, Whole Foods
- If going into a store: Organize your shopping list to correspond with the layout of the grocery store. Shop when the store is not busy. Get help reaching for high and low items and for carrying heavy items. Use the store's electric scooter to move about the store. Ask the clerk to bag the groceries lightly and to bag

cold and frozen food together. Make several trips to bring the groceries into the house. Take cold and frozen foods first, then after you resting, return for the remainder.

LAUNDRY: Sit to sort clothes, pre-treat stains and fold laundry. Transfer wet clothes into dryer a few items at a time and use a reacher if needed. Get help to fold large items such as sheets.

HOUSEWORK: Divide each room into smaller areas and tackle these sections. Use long handled dusters and cleaning attachments. Use a mop to clean up spills instead of bending over. Pick up items off the floor using a reacher. Use paper towels to eliminate extra laundry. Break up chores over the whole week, doing a little each day.

RETURNING TO WORK: Speak with your boss about slowly returning to work or reducing the number of hours you work daily/weekly. Increase your workload slowly over time. Take frequent physical and mental breaks to lessen anxiety and stress. Seek assistance from coworkers. Pace yourself and stay hydrated.

MANAGING YOUR EMOTIONS



Your emotions are directly connected to your body, which has undergone many changes during your COVID illness. It is normal to experience depression, stress and anxiety. Start with one of the below ideas, and then add a new one each week.

- Eat healthy, balanced meals
- Exercise regularly
- Get plenty of sleep
- Avoid excessive alcohol, tobacco, and substance use
- Take deep breaths and include stretching
- Spend time outdoors, either being physically active or relaxing
- Take breaks from watching, reading or listening to news stories including social media
- Make time to unwind including doing activities you enjoy.
- Connect with others by speaking with someone you trust about concerns and how you're feeling

SLEEPING AND BREATHING | Positioning & Mobility as Medicine

It is important to keep moving and stay active to prevent decline in your mobility. Begin by walking daily and increasing the amount of exercise you get, aim for at least 20 minutes daily. Exercise benefits include improving heart, bone and joint health, increasing muscle strength and range of motion, promoting better sleep and higher energy while also improved mental health and reduced brain fog.

If coughing has become unmanageable, consider holding a pillow to your stomach and crossing your arms over your stomach or lean slightly forward to assist in decreasing the intensity and frequency of the cough. Staying hydrated also makes coughing easier. Huffing (forcefully exhaling "Ha! Ha! Ha!") can aid in opening your lungs.

To help your sleeping, elevating your head at night can make breathing easier. Also using a humidifier, or taking a hot bath/shower can moisten the air and aid in breathing as well. Lying on your stomach can help you breathe easier by improving how your lungs work. Use pillows for support; turn your head to one side and place a pillow at your upper chest/shoulders, hips and ankles. If you are having difficulty falling asleep the Calm app has bed time stories and relaxing meditations.

STRATEGIES TO DECREASE BRAIN FOG

Each COVID Long Hauler symptoms can lead to difficulty focusing and performing at your normal level. The below tips can help improve your thinking and ability to focus:

- Limit distractions
- Allow extra time to complete tasks
- Reduce background noise
- Create to-do lists
- Use organization or list-making apps
- Read slowly
- Close your eyes, and take some slow deep breaths for 3 minutes
- Play brain games (solitaire, crossword puzzles, board games, games that include a memory element)