

Covid After Effects

Why some people experience long-term coronavirus symptoms

Updated Feb. 8, 2021

Source: UC Davis Health

Novel coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms can last weeks or months for some people. These patients, given the name "**long haulers**", have in theory recovered from the worst impacts of COVID-19 and have tested negative. However, they still have symptoms. There seems to be no consistent reason for this to happen.

Researchers estimate about 10% of COVID-19 patients become long haulers, **according to a recent article from The Journal of the American Medical Association** and a **study done by British scientists**. That's in line with what UC Davis Health is seeing.

This condition can effect anyone – old and young, otherwise healthy people and those battling other conditions. It has been seen in those who were hospitalized with COVID-19 and patients with very mild symptoms.

Watch UC Davis Live on Long Haulers featuring two UC Davis experts

'Haunting to experience': COVID-19 'long-hauler' treated at UC Davis Health shares her story (from KCRA 3 News)

What Is a COVID-Long Hauler? The People Whose COVID-19 Symptoms Won't Go Away (from Inside Edition)

What are common COVID-19 symptoms of long haulers?

The list of long hauler symptoms is long, wide and inconsistent. For some people, the lasting **coronavirus symptoms** are nothing like the original symptoms when they were first infected with COVID-19. The most common long hauler symptoms include:

- Coughing
- Ongoing, sometimes debilitating, fatigue
- Body aches
- Joint pain
- Shortness of breath
- Loss of taste and smell — even if this didn't occur during the height of illness
- Difficulty sleeping
- Headaches
- Brain fog

Brain fog is among the most confusing symptoms for long haulers. Patients report being unusually forgetful, confused or unable to concentrate even enough to watch TV. This can happen to people who were in an intensive care unit for a while, but it's relatively rare. However, it is happening to a variety of patients, including those who weren't hospitalized.

Some people have reported feeling better for days or even weeks then relapsing. For others, it's a case of just not feeling like themselves.

Why do long haulers continue to experience long-term COVID-19 symptoms?

There's not a lot of information on long haulers, who only recently received attention from experts because it's also so new. The vast majority of long haulers test negative for COVID-19. There's nothing specific to test for lasting coronavirus symptoms.

One common theory about patients with long-term COVID-19 symptoms is that the virus possibly remains in their bodies in some small form. Another theory is their immune systems continue to overreact even though the infection has passed.

What is being done to help COVID-19 long haulers?

As with many other COVID-19 issues, it's hard to identify why something is occurring when the disease was discovered less than a year ago. Learning how to treat long haulers also requires time.

Also, because the disease is so new, much of the information about COVID-19 cases and care is anecdotal. However, that is changing.

UC Davis Health launched the [region's first Post-COVID-19 Clinic](#) to provide streamlined, comprehensive specialty care for long haulers. We are one of only a handful of health systems in the U.S. to create a clinic that cares for these patients.

[Learn more about COVID-19 long haulers](#)

[Learn more about UC Davis Health's Post-COVID-19 Clinic](#)

Can COVID-19 long-haul symptoms cause permanent damage?

The answer to this is not clear. Health care providers don't know how many of these symptoms are permanent, or if there is permanent damage being done. Some patients who have been seriously ill from COVID-19 develop acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), which can permanently scar their lungs. But it's not clear if there is any scarring for long-haulers who have respiratory issues but not at the severe level of ARDS.

Other patients with long-term loss of smell and taste worry about permanent damage, too. Experts believe that the loss of smell and taste won't be permanent. For most people, there will likely be resolution, but there isn't a clear answer as to how long this will take.

[Learn about the frightening uncertainty for long-haul COVID-19 patients](#)

As a COVID long hauler, should I get a COVID-19 vaccine?

Researchers still don't know much about what causes long hauler symptoms and why they experience such long-term effects. Our infectious disease experts say you should ask your physician before scheduling an appointment to get a COVID-19 vaccine.

I'm a COVID long hauler. Can UC Davis Health help me?

If you wish to set up an appointment with our [Post-COVID-19 Clinic](#), you can call our referral center at [1-800-4-UCDAVIS](tel:1-800-4-UCDAVIS) (1-800-482-3284). Select option #3. Please note that an in-person evaluation is required.

If I live outside of the Sacramento region, can I get care at the Post-COVID-19 Clinic?

[UC Davis Health's Post-COVID-19 Clinic](#) requires an in-person visit in order to ensure a full medical evaluation and care. If you are unable to travel for care, we recommend seeking care at the academic medical center nearest you for their post-COVID-19 treatment options. These types of medical centers – like ours – are often the best at addressing complex health conditions.

Additional COVID-19 Information from UC Davis Health



[Learn about COVID-19 symptoms](#)



[Learn about COVID-19 treatments](#)

