

PRINT-Many COVID-19 Long-haulers experience Mental Health issues

[New research](#) has found that nearly one person in five diagnosed with COVID-19 also suffers with a psychiatric disorder such as anxiety, depression or insomnia within three months. Sam Sears, MD, director of physician services for OSF Behavioral Health, says the condition's prolonged symptoms, which can come and go, put people on a roller coaster. They can often start feeling better but then seem to relapse or experience new symptoms. Some have not been able to return to work.

People who experience symptoms longer than six weeks have long COVID, and they're also referred to as long-haulers. According to Dr. Sears, many long-haulers have anxiety because they have so many unanswered questions.

“When are my symptoms going to get better? When am I going to feel a certain way? When? When? When? And ultimately, many of these things there aren't concrete answers of 'You're going to have difficulties for this amount of time,' because again, while we've learned an awful lot about COVID-19 over the last year-plus, we don't know everything yet.”

In addition, Dr. Sears points out people with long COVID who experience so-called brain fog face the prospect of a long road to recovery based on what is known from working with patients who have suffered a concussion, stroke or other traumatic brain injury.

“We do know that things that have direct neurologic impact take much longer to heal than other body systems, which tend to heal at a much faster rate than neurologic issues.”

Some symptoms, such as a loss of smell and taste, can also be depressing and it can be distressing when loved ones question whether symptoms are real or psychological. The advice for friends, family and co-workers of long haulers – just be supportive.

“While you may not understand the experience they're having, being there to support and listen can be incredibly helpful to the individual. And just because you don't understand what they're going through doesn't mean your support can't mean the world to them.”

[Post-traumatic stress disorder \(PTSD\)](#) is often found in patients who have spent time in a hospital's intensive care ward, particularly if they were on a ventilator. Dr. Sears says PTSD has been reported among long COVID patients and is connected to the trauma some experience by being so incapacitated and facing their own mortality.

Most people with PTSD require a combination of counseling and medicine for treatment. Dr. Sears says with any of the mental health challenges for long-haulers, recognizing symptoms and getting help early is important.

Help is available through an OSF HealthCare primary care provider who can [have a specialist review](#) a person's medical history and COVID-19 lingering symptoms and offer options within 24 hours.

The NIH is encouraging people who are experiencing lingering symptoms to [download its Symptom Study app](#) to be part of the second phase of the study using data collected from app users who report symptoms over time.

The initial research, involving more than 4.2 million people, created a simple algorithm based on age, gender, and number of early symptoms that accurately predicted almost 70% of cases of long COVID.

If you are recovering from COVID-19, find a [primary care provider](#) to get the proper support to manage ongoing symptoms.