

Fatigue

Category: 2 Symptom

What is fatigue like in Long COVID?

Fatigue is common and often experienced as a debilitating symptom for people with Long COVID.



The feeling of fatigue from Long COVID is more than just 'feeling tired.' It is an overwhelming sense of exhaustion that can make it harder for you to do everything you would like to do. Fatigue can be physical but also mental and social/emotional, and it can prevent you from doing your day-to-day activities.

The exact cause of fatigue in Long COVID is unknown. For some people with Long COVID, the fatigue experienced is similar to what is experienced by people who have Myalgic Encephalitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME/CFS). We are trying to understand how Long COVID and ME/CFS may be related.

This type of fatigue from Long COVID doesn't always get better with rest and it may last for several days. You may find when you try to 'push' through your symptoms to return to your usual activities, your fatigue gets much worse and you 'crash.' This is referred to as post-exertional malaise which is fatigue and symptoms that follow a **push/crash cycle**. Staying in this cycle can significantly impact your quality of life, as well as prolong your recovery.



POST-COVID-19
Interdisciplinary Clinical Care Network
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Causes of fatigue

There can be many causes of fatigue in addition to Long COVID, and often people have more than one cause. It is important to discuss your fatigue with a doctor so that other potential causes can be diagnosed and treated right away. Even if they are not the main reason you are experiencing fatigue, these other causes can make your Long COVID symptoms worse.

Below are just a few conditions that may contribute to fatigue for people with Long COVID. It could be helpful to explore them with your primary care provider.

- **Sleep apnea** is when your breathing stops for short periods during sleep. You may experience snoring, gasping for air at night, unrefreshing sleep, morning headaches, and/or drowsiness during the day.
- **Insomnia** is poor sleep. You may find that you are unable to fall asleep when you first go to bed, wake up in the middle of the night, and are not able to fall back asleep.
- **Depression and/or anxiety.** You may feel unhappy or sad. You may have worries or fears that don't seem to stop, despite your best efforts. You may experience little interest or pleasure in doing things, poor concentration or indecisiveness, sleeping too much or too little, and/or increased or decreased appetite. You may have thoughts of harming yourself or others, thoughts of death and dying, and/or feeling worthless or guilty. Speak to a doctor if you are experiencing symptoms of depression and/or anxiety.

- **Iron deficiency anemia** is when your body does not have enough iron and so oxygen is not reaching all parts of your body. You may experience lightheadedness, shortness of breath, palpitations, leg cramps, excessive craving for ice, hair loss, pale appearance, and/or headaches.

Speak to a doctor if you are experiencing these symptoms and ask if an iron study would be appropriate for you. Iron studies refer to a group of blood tests that measure iron levels in the body. [The Canadian Guideline for Post COVID-19 Condition](#) has suggested doing iron studies to diagnose (or rule out) iron deficiency anemia in people with Long COVID who experience fatigue.

What can you do?

Pacing is an evidence-based management strategy for symptoms of Long COVID, including fatigue. Pacing is a strategy to help avoid the push/crash cycle which is commonly experienced by people with Long COVID. There is some understanding that the earlier you are able to pace, the more quickly you are able to recover.

We suggest reading about [post-exertional malaise](#) next to help you better understand this type of fatigue related to Long COVID.

Other strategies that have been shown to be helpful are:

- Energy Conservation and Pacing
- Breath Work
- Sleep Hygiene

Where to next?

- Read the recommendation by Canadian Guidelines for Post COVID-19 Condition on [iron studies](#).
- Watch [videos](#) by [healthexperiences.ca](#) in which individuals with Long COVID describe different symptoms they experience, including post-exertional malaise.