



Understanding and Managing Post-COVID Syndrome (Long COVID)

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Post-COVID syndrome (also called Long COVID) means that **symptoms continue for weeks or months after the original COVID infection is gone.**

Doctors and scientists are still learning what causes post-COVID syndrome. There is **no single proven cure yet**, but many helpful treatments can reduce symptoms and improve daily life.

This article falls within the framework of the **biopsychosocial model of stress**. It means that stress is not caused by one thing – it is the result of how the body, mind and social environment interact.



Medicines That Might Help

Right now, no medication is officially approved for post-COVID syndrome.

But doctors sometimes try certain drugs that are already used for other illnesses (“off-label use”).

Examples include:

- **Antidepressants** – Depression is common in post-COVID syndrome (seen in up to 60% of patients in rehab programs). Some antidepressants may reduce tiredness and the body’s immune response. In particular, serotonin inhibitors might lower the risk of getting post-COVID syndrome by around 30%.
- **Blood pressure drugs** (beta-blockers) **and allergy medicines** (antihistamines) – might calm the body’s stress.
- **Anti-inflammatory medicines** – could be effective for inflammatory conditions and related mental health disorders. However, the association between inflammation and depressive symptoms is inconsistent and appears to affect only about one-third of patients.
- **Supplements that protect cells** (for example antioxidants) – have sometimes shown a beneficial effect on the psychological symptoms of post-COVID syndrome.

⚠ Be careful with expensive “miracle treatments.”

Some patients are offered costly options (like blood washing or “apheresis”) that don’t have any scientific proof.

If a drug isn’t paid for by public insurance, it’s usually because it hasn’t been shown to work, not because it’s too expensive.



Non-Medical Treatments That Work To Reduce Stress

Many people improve with psychological and physical therapies — especially when both are combined.

Helpful methods include:

- **Cognitive behavioral therapy** – helps deal with fatigue and stress.
- **Gentle exercise and rehabilitation programs** – can reduce inflammation and improve mood and energy levels.
- **“Pacing”** – finding a rhythm that works for you so you can do more in the long run without crashing.
- **Relaxation, breathing, and mindfulness** – such as meditation or progressive muscle relaxation. These can lower stress and inflammation in the body.
- **Group therapy and patient support groups** – help people feel understood and less alone. Online groups can be a great option when energy is low.



How Psychology Can Help the Body

• Psychoeducation

Psychoeducational group therapy is a great way to deliver clear, trustworthy information about the illness (see the dedicated handbook by Alexa Kupferschmitt and Volker Köllner, 2025).

Adding breaks during sessions is also very helpful for people suffering from post-COVID syndrome.

• Avoidance-endurance model

People with post-COVID syndrome often react in two ways: some push through their symptoms and keep going, even when it makes things worse;

others avoid activity out of fear it will make them feel worse. With support from a therapist, people can learn to listen to their body, pace themselves better, and find a healthier balance.

• **Acceptance & commitment therapy**

This therapy helps patients shift from fighting the illness to accepting it, reducing psychological suffering.

Acceptance is not passive—it's an active step toward meaningful change, especially for those feeling powerless.

• **Predictive coding & expectation Management**

Symptoms like fatigue may persist due to mismatched expectations and self-image.

Patients with high performance standards struggle to integrate their new limitations.

Therapy should focus on adjusting expectations, building a compassionate therapeutic alliance, and using graded movement therapy.

Even small improvements should be celebrated, and relapses reframed as learning opportunities.



Practical Tips for Recovery

- **Learn about post-COVID syndrome** — understanding it helps reduce fear.
- **Keep a symptom and energy diary** to find your limits.
- **Take small, regular steps instead of pushing too hard.**
- **Rest before you're exhausted.**
- **Connect with others** who have post-COVID syndrome — sharing experiences helps emotionally.
- **Celebrate small improvements** — recovery often comes slowly, but progress counts.



Quick Facts

TOPIC NUMBER / FINDING

- **Some antidepressants** may lower post-COVID syndrome risk by about 30%.
- Depression seen in post-COVID syndrome: **rehab patients around 60%.**
- Off-label **medicines officially approved: none yet.**
- Most effective treatments: **cognitive behavioral therapy + gentle exercise + pacing.**

Glossary:

- **Post-COVID syndrome / Long COVID:** Ongoing symptoms after a COVID infection.
- **Fatigue:** Extreme tiredness that rest doesn't fix.
- **Off-label:** Using a medicine for a new purpose.
- **Cognitive behavioral therapy:** A type of therapy that changes negative thinking habits.
- **Pacing:** Managing your energy to avoid "crashes".
- **Mindfulness:** Paying calm attention to your body and feelings.
- **Inflammation:** The body's reaction to infection or stress.

Pictures

Royalty-free image. Downloaded November 06, 2025, from <https://www.canva.com/>