

Take on the Long-Term Effects of COVID-19 with Therapy

Since the onset of COVID-19, varying levels of long-term impact have been observed. Some recover quickly, while others suffer from long-lasting effects for an extended period after their initial recovery.

According to the Mayo Clinic, “Older people and people with many serious medical conditions are the most likely to experience lingering COVID-19 symptoms.”¹

Some of these symptoms include:

- Fatigue
- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Headache
- Pain

The long-term effects of COVID-19 are wide-ranging, with evidence showing damage not only to the lungs, but to other organs such as the heart, brain and blood vessels. In some cases, COVID-19 has caused increased risk of heart failure, stroke, cognitive issues and abnormal blood clotting.

Individuals who required intensive care during their recovery may develop PICS (Post Intensive Care Syndrome). These people may suffer from weakness from degenerated nerves and muscles, poor nutrition, infection, wounds or even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Additionally, mental health issues can arise post COVID-19, such as anxiety and depression. Social isolation can also result in increased negative behaviors in those with dementia or cognitive impairments.

These lingering effects of COVID-19 can have a drastic impact on an individual's ability to function. Here's how physical, occupational and speech therapy can play a pivotal role in a successful recovery.

Physical Therapy

- Address muscle weakness to prevent falls and can improve the ability to sit, stand and walk
- Help to prevent frailty or pre-frailty related declines
- Provide wound care for pressure ulcers as a result of poor nutrition or immobilization



- Deliver a respiratory assessment along with techniques for lung-clearance and respiratory strength training
- Address lingering pain through non-pharmacological techniques
- Develop an exercise program that safely addresses the cardiovascular limitations of a person while still building or sustaining muscle strength
- Create a home exercise program to relieve stress and anxiety and the opportunity to maximize functional independence
- Restore community activities with compensatory techniques or adaptations as needed

Occupational Therapy

- Assess for and provide appropriate equipment needed to make a person safe, increase their ability to function, avoid pressure ulcers and compensate for weakness
- Restore strength to weakened muscles to improve the ability to perform Activities of Daily Living (ADLs)
- Deliver a cognitive assessment and develop a functional cognitive stimulation program
- Provide a psychosocial assessment and create an individualized activity program to improve psychosocial well-being
- Train on energy conservation techniques
- Address negative behaviors related to cognitive declines and mental health issues

Speech Therapy

- Address respiratory and swallow coordination that can be affected by breathing issues
- Provide voice assessment and treatment for improved communication as a result of being intubated or on mechanical ventilation
- Analyze causes of and treatments for nutritional decline and weight loss
- Assess and treat for cognitive deficits impacting communication, including the ability to follow directions, expressing wants and needs, problem solving and communicating virtually with loved ones
- Evaluate mental health issues and develop strategies to improve communication – such as the ability to communicate pain, anxiety or depression – and decrease negative behaviors

When therapy is included in the care plan for long-term COVID-19 recovery it can lead to improved strength, increased safety and better quality of life.



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