

Natural Solutions for Long COVID

Although many people who caught COVID-19, the SARS-Cov-2 coronavirus, recovered within a couple of weeks, other people are reporting symptoms that have lasted long after the acute infection. This problem is commonly called post or long COVID. It happens to about one in five people who had the infection, with slightly higher rates in the elderly.

The most common symptoms of long COVID include ongoing respiratory problems, like shortness of breath and chronic cough. Neurological problems, such as fatigue, anxiety, depression, insomnia, difficulty concentrating, dizziness upon standing, and headaches, are also common. Some people have problems with their digestive system, such as diarrhea. Still others experience circulatory issues like increased blood clotting, rapid heart rate, and chest pain.

If you had COVID and feel like you've never recovered, this newsletter may help. We'll take a look at a process called convalescence and how it applies to long COVID. We'll talk about reasons why you might be having continuing problems and what you can do to aid your recovery.

Why Persistent Symptoms?

Long Covid

Chronic Tiredness and Exhaustion (Fatigue)
Sleep Disorder
Inability to Concentrate
Headaches
Hair Loss



Depression
Anxiety
Loss of Taste and Smell
Long Lasting Cough
Sore Throat

Palpitations
Shortness of Breath
Muscle Weakness

There are a couple of reasons why an illness like COVID might have residual effects. First, tissue responds to infection through an inflammatory process. COVID can cause severe inflammation, and this inflammation may have caused damage to various tissues, which need time and support to heal properly.

The symptoms you experience from inflammatory damage will depend on which tissues were severely inflamed. Severe respiratory inflammation may cause scarring in the lungs which can cause chronic cough and make breathing more difficult. Intestinal inflammation may damage the gut lining and microbiome causing dysbiosis, leaky gut, diarrhea, or constipation. Cardiovascular inflammation can damage the heart and arterial lining, affecting blood circulation, blood pressure, and heart function. Damage to the nervous system can affect things like your mood, sense of balance, and sleep cycle.

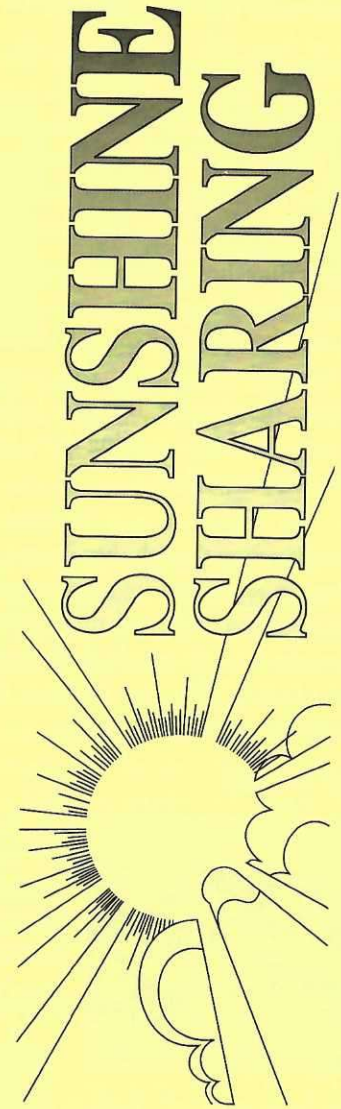
Secondly, serious illness is stressful and there is a great deal of fear surrounding COVID. And high levels of stress disrupts nervous and glandular function. Getting back to normal after suffering any extreme stress takes extra rest, time, and perhaps even counseling or therapy. Herbal and/or nutritional support can also help in getting back to normal.

Finally, it has long been recognized that recovery from any illness requires a period of convalescence. Convalescence is the period of time between feeling acutely ill and feeling completely healthy. For example, if you get food poisoning, you start to feel better after you throw up. That's the turning point of the disease, traditionally called the disease crisis. After the crisis has passed you'll start to feel better, but you'll still feel tired and need a period of time to regain your former health and strength.

Supporting Convalescence

Part of the reason why COVID may have left persistent symptoms is many people don't understand the importance of convalescence or aren't able to give adequate time to this part of the recovery process. And convalescence is an important part of the ongoing process of recovery.

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Your guide to better health the natural way.

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Convalescence requires time. The time required for patients to recover their strength used to be accounted for in the practice of medicine. And, there were sanitoriums where sick people could spend time recovering under continued medical care. But due to a combination of lack of space, inadequate funds, and a loss of understanding patients are often sent home when they still need care.

Over time, hospital stays have shortened to make room for new patients. Today, as soon as a person is stable, they will be discharged from the hospital, even though they are not completely well. They may be sent home with no clear suggestions on what they can do to restore their health. If they're lucky, they may have a loved one who can spend time nursing them back to health, but this doesn't always happen, either.

So, an individual may be faced with having to take care of themselves even though they do not feel completely well. This has resulted in an increasing number of re-admissions, where people suffer a relapse and need to be put back into the hospital. And it may also be why people don't completely heal from something like COVID. With that problem in mind, here are some basic suggestions for convalescence.

Take it Easy



You need to get extra rest after any serious illness until you have fully recovered. If you have someone who can help take care of you during this period so you don't have to cook and clean for yourself, that's even better.

If you're having problems sleeping, start by establishing a set routine as this helps train your body to fall into a natural circadian rhythm, a natural oscillation between sleeping and waking. Second, do things to relax before your scheduled bedtime. Don't watch, read, or listen to anything disturbing such as news or even dramatic movies or TV shows. Listen to soft music, read an uplifting book, take a warm bath, or even get a loved one to rub your back to help you naturally unwind and prepare for sleep.

Avoid stimulants such as caffeine and nicotine and don't eat heavy meals before bedtime. Darken your room as much as possible and don't watch TV, work on a computer, or use your smartphone for 30-60 minutes prior to bedtime. This aids the natural production of melatonin to help you get to sleep.

Eat Mild Foods

After being sick a person may not be able to properly digest heavy foods. A mild food diet is a good strategy to help aid recovery. This involves a diet primarily of cooked vegetables with some fruits, perhaps a little fermented dairy (like yoghurt or keifer), and mild grains like rice or millet.

The phytochemicals present in brightly colored fruits and vegetables will reduce inflammation and aid tissue healing. The fiber in these foods will also help restore gut flora, which makes this diet helpful in recovery.

Some herbalists have also advocated diets of mucilaginous herbs for recovery, such as slippery elm gruel, barley water, or marshmallow. This also helps restore gut flora, reduce inflammation, and speed healing.

Get Emotional Support



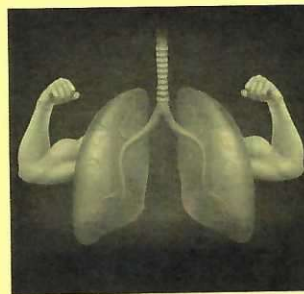
If illness has left you in an emotionally disturbed state, you should seek emotional support from loved ones or friends. If this is not available, seek help from professionals. It may also help to take some relaxing nervines if you're feeling anxious, such as hops, valerian, skullcap, or passionflower. Nourishing adaptogens like ashwagandha, holy basil, or cordyceps may also be helpful, especially if taken regularly for several months. If depression is a problem, mild mood-elevating herbs like rosemary, mimosa, or St. John's wort may be helpful.

Specific Aids for Long COVID

The SARS-Cov-2 virus has a spike protein on its surface that attaches to a cell receptor known as ACE2. ACE2 receptors are found in many systems of the body but are prominent in lung, heart, and kidney cells. As the virus attaches to the cell receptor it is able to inject its DNA or RNA into the cell and hijack the cellular mechanisms for DNA or RNA replication.

This damages the cells and triggers an inflammatory reaction that activates the innate immune system. The immune system may also overreact, which can lead to tissue damage. Since the lungs were a major site of COVID infection, we'll start by looking at respiratory symptoms from long COVID.

Aids to Respiratory Recovery



People who were seriously ill with COVID may have some residual lung damage, often in the form of a scarring of lung tissue known as fibrosis. Pulmonary fibrosis makes lung tissue less elastic and more rigid, which decreases the ability of the tissue to expand and contract, lowering the exchange of oxygen.

This can lead to shortness of breath, becoming fatigued during exercise, and eventually respiratory failure. This also happens in emphysema or COPD.

Working with respiratory symptoms that are the aftermath of COVID is no different than working with other respiratory problems. It starts with assessing the state of the respiratory system. Here are the things to look at.

Assessing Respiratory Status

First, is the mucus production abundant, that is, is there an excess of mucus drainage or mucus being coughed out of the lungs? Or, is mucus production deficient, that is, there is a dry, hacking cough or sinus irritation with very little drainage. One can also use the tongue to help determine this. If the tongue is moist,

with a heavy coating the system is congested. If it is dry with a scant coating, there is a lack of mucus secretion. If the mucus is abundant, drying remedies are needed. If it is deficient, moistening remedies are needed.

Second, what is the color of the mucus. Yellow or green mucus generally indicates infection and heat (irritation). This is often caused by a bacterial infection or severe allergic reaction. White or pale mucus is associated with a more cold condition, and is typical of viral infections or mild allergic reactions. These indications can often be seen on the tongue as well, which may have a white or yellow coloring. Yellow or greenish mucus calls for cooling remedies, while white or pale mucus calls for warming remedies.

Two other factors that help determine the appropriate remedies are bronchial constriction and a lack of elasticity in the lungs. Constriction is characterized by asthma-like symptoms which involve a feeling of constriction in the respiratory passages that inhibits breathing. Inhalation tends to be difficult. When there is a lack of elasticity, there is typically wheezing and exhaling may also be difficult. Constriction requires antispasmodic remedies. A lack of elasticity requires lung tonics that aid healing of damaged lung tissue.

Selecting Respiratory Remedies



With this understanding, here are some of the remedies that can be used to aid the respiratory system following COVID or any other lung infection. In addition to the list of remedies for each category, you'll also find secondary properties of some of the remedies, which helps you see

how they work on more than one category of symptoms.

To get rid of excess mucus you can use warming (stimulating) expectorants. These are herbs with an aromatic quality that help to move congested mucus out of the respiratory passages. They may temporarily increase coughing or sneezing as they aid the expulsion of congested mucus. Remedies include fenugreek (moistening), onion, grindelia or gumweed, pine bark or resin (drying), yerba santa (drying, relaxing), thyme, myrrh (drying), and horseradish.

If the lungs are dry, you need moistening expectorants. These remedies are demulcent in nature and help to increase and thin mucus secretions. They should be taken with plenty of water to help hydrate the lung tissue. These include fenugreek, marshmallow, licorice (cooling), plantain, and mullein.

When mucus is yellow or greenish in color, herbs containing berberine are often indicated. These include goldenseal, Oregon grape, or barberry. Inhaling the essential oils of eucalyptus or pine may also help.

If airways are constricted, antispasmodics may be helpful for opening air passages. These include lobelia, khella, and skunk cabbage.

Finally, nourishing and supporting lung tissue with herbs that act as respiratory tonics are also helpful. These include cordyceps, astragalus (moistening), elecampane, and prince seng.

Aids to Cardiovascular Care



One of the problems associated with long COVID is increased blood clot formation, which can lead to pulmonary embolism, stroke, and sudden death. There are also reports that increased clotting may also be a side effect of the COVID vaccines. The mechanism for this is not fully understood, but

suggests that people who are experiencing cardiovascular symptoms from long COVID may need blood thinners to support their health and recovery. Natural remedies that can help prevent blood clots in the cardiovascular system include nattokinase, fish oil (omega-3 essential fatty acids), and vitamin E.

There may also be residual heart damage due to COVID. This may have been caused by a lack of oxygen due to the respiratory problems caused by COVID infections, but it's also possible that the virus may have directly infected the heart and or blood vessels causing inflammation to these tissues. For these problems herbs that act as tonics to the cardiovascular system may aid healing. These include hawthorn, arjuna, and linden. Also helpful will be antioxidant fruits such as bilberry, blueberries, black cherry, pomegranate, and cranberry juice.

Stress and neurological damage may also result in problems with heart rhythm. In this case, working on restoring balance to the nervous and glandular system will be helpful as is discussed next.

Neuroendocrine Rebalancing



Following a serious viral infection like COVID, the autonomic nervous system (ANS) can become dysregulated, a condition called dysautonomia. The glandular system may also be disturbed causing neuroendocrine (nervous and glandular) dysfunction. A variety of symptoms can emerge from this neuroendocrine dysfunction.

These include circulatory problems, heart rate and blood pressure variability, fatigue and intolerance for exercise, sleep disturbances, difficulty concentrating or remembering things (brain fog), and gastrointestinal upset.

If you're experiencing any of these symptoms rest is very important, especially getting a good night's sleep. If you're having difficulty getting to sleep, melatonin may be helpful. To help sleep try taking both a 5 mg sublingual melatonin, which is fast acting for getting to sleep, along with a 5 mg sustained release melatonin to help you stay asleep. Melatonin is also helpful for reducing blood levels of the excessive inflammatory messengers called cytokines, which was often a problem with COVID.

Magnesium is another important nutrient that may help the nervous system. A large percentage of the population is deficient

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in magnesium and adequate levels improve sleep, reduce anxiety and irritability, and relieve muscle tension.

You can reduce inflammation in the nervous system with curcumin, which has also been helpful for many people suffering from cognitive issues after COVID. Curcumin also helps control inflammatory cytokines and helps block viral replication.

Zinc and quercetin may also be helpful. Quercetin can help reduce inflammation in the nervous system and brain fog. It also helps zinc get into the cells where it can inhibit viral replication. The World Health Organization suggests that one out of six respiratory infections world-wide are caused by zinc deficiencies.¹

Thomas Easley reports that lithium orotate can be helpful for long COVID problems involving anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbance. He recommends taking 5 mg per day and upping the dose every few days until sleep quality improves or the maximum dose of 20 mg. per day is reached. Lithium can help reduce neuro-inflammation and improve mood.

Adaptogens and tonics for the adrenal glands may also be helpful for rebalancing the nervous and glandular system. Ashwagandha root is a good choice. It's a slow-acting tonic for anxiety and needs to be taken in larger doses (5-15 grams per day) for several weeks to see the best results. Thereafter, a maintenance dose of 1-2 grams per day should sustain the effect.

Another option is cordyceps. Cordyceps is a tonic for balancing nervous function and is also a beneficial tonic for weakened lung and kidney tissue.

Aids to Reviving Gut Health

Mood can also affect gut health and gut health can affect mood. About 30% of people will have digestive problems after COVID. Many people experience loose stools and symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) after COVID.

This appears to be related to changes in the microbiome. Thomas Easley found that andrographis (3 or 4 capsules several

times a day) and cinnamon (1 capsule several times a day) could help correct the loose stool problems.

Probiotics will also be helpful for restoring gut health, but they need to be taken in large doses to be effective, up to 50 billion bacteria or more each day. It's also important to increase intake of prebiotics, which act as food for these intestinal bacteria.

Fruits and vegetables contain indigestible fibers that help to feed friendly bacteria, which is why a mild food diet, mentioned earlier, is probably helpful during convalescence. It also helps to consume herbs high in inulin, such as burdock, dandelion root, and chicory. Jerusalem artichokes are a vegetable that is high in the prebiotic inulin. Start slowly with these remedies as you may experience excessive gas at first.

Generally speaking, most of these issues will resolve themselves over time as the nervous system is able to rebalance itself. Some general health practices that will aid this process include moderate exercise, eating smaller meals, drinking more water along with taking some natural salt, and working to manage stress.

Parting Thoughts

Although there are more possible symptoms associated with long COVID, this information is enough to get started. If you're suffering from long COVID, be assured that there is hope and seek professional assistance to help you complete your COVID convalescence successfully.

Additional Help and Information

For more information on possible remedies for long COVID or convalescences from other major illness, contact the person who gave you this newsletter. You can also consult the following resources:

Thomas Easley's course: Understanding and Managing Long COVID Patterns, <https://eclecticschoolofherbalmedicine.com/event/understanding-and-managing-long-covid-patterns-a-holistic-approach/>

KP Khalsa's Healing Solutions for Long Covid, <https://internationalintegrative.com/product/long-covid-webinar/?highlight=covid>

Footnotes

¹ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32754164/>