



What is Long covid?

Long covid is a term to describe the effects of Covid-19 that continue for weeks or months beyond the initial illness. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) defines long covid as symptoms that last for more than 12 weeks.

According to Office for National Statistics, 1.1 million people in the UK were reporting long covid symptoms in the four weeks to 6th March 2021. These were defined as symptoms that had lasted more than four weeks from initial infection (as opposed to NICE 12 week description), although for more than two thirds of these people the symptoms had lasted more than 12 weeks.

Twenty percent said their symptoms limited their daily activities a lot and there is now a discussion about whether long covid should be classed as a disability and therefore fall under the Equality Act.

Common symptoms

Long covid symptoms tend to fall under two categories;

Respiratory: Cough, breathlessness but also fatigue and headaches

and/or

Heart, brain, gut: palpitations or increased heartbeat, as well as pins and needles, numbness, joint and muscle pain and 'brain fog' i.e. cognitive blunting.

It should be noted that long covid isn't impacted by the severity of the original case. So, in other words it doesn't matter whether the individual had a severe case or was hospitalised, that is not the determinant of long covid, it can just as easily be someone who has light symptoms.



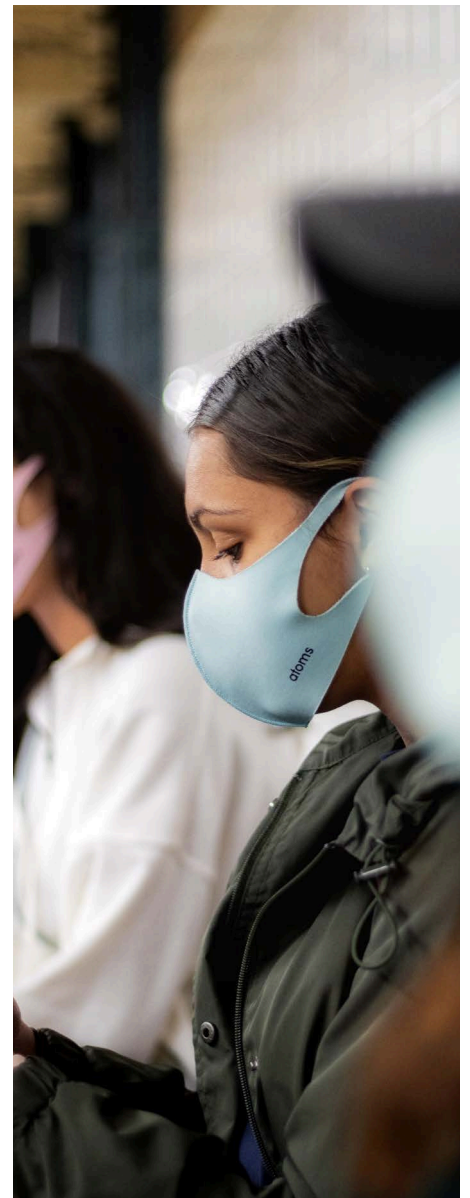
Older people, women, and those who had five or more symptoms in the first week of becoming ill with Covid-19 are most likely to develop long covid.



Who is most at risk of developing long covid?

Research shows that long covid affects around ten per cent of 18-49 year olds who get Covid-19, increasing to 22 per cent of people over 70. Researchers also found people with asthma were also more likely to develop long covid. This was the only clear link they found to existing health conditions in people who developed long covid.

A study in Leicester of people who had been hospitalised by covid found that the people who were most likely to be affected by long covid tended to be White women aged 40 to 60 with two or more medical conditions such as a cardiovascular condition, asthma or type 2 diabetes. This is very different from those who are most likely to need hospital treatment for Covid-19, who are more likely to be male and from an ethnic minority background.



Getting help

Arguably, the hardest issue regarding long covid is going to be diagnosis.

Clearly, there will be people who have coughs and lung issues from having covid that will continue for several weeks. However, these people are not necessarily described as long covid victims and their issues will be managed by their health advisors (e.g. NHS GP or Consultant) as you would expect for any standard health issue.

People who declare symptoms such as fatigue, breathlessness, cognitive blunting or pain after 4 weeks should contact their GP as soon as possible to get the support they need.

Some examples of potential external interventions that the NHS might be able to provide are:

- **Respiratory physiotherapy:** Could include breathing exercises/ techniques.
- **Occupational therapy.** To manage fatigue and help with memory problems.
- **Complementary therapy.** Therapies to aid sleep and reduce stress.
- **Talking therapies.** To help with fear, anxiety and low mood and other psychological impacts.
- **Physiotherapy.** This can be valuable in the context of post-Covid musculoskeletal pain.

Its also extremely important that people showing signs of long covid bring it to the attention of their employer.

Long covid symptoms tend to come in waves similar to a rollercoaster so there will be an impact on the ability to perform at work at the highest level all the time. Long covid impacts on energy levels and even the fittest people are finding themselves exhausted.

Some people are reporting that long covid is similar to M.E. and that the intensity of the symptoms can fluctuate, so it may appear that the employee is improving and then suddenly get a relapse.

The impact of long covid mentally is also important to note because the symptoms will create anxiety and even depression especially in those who seemed very fit and perfectly well before getting long covid.

The employer may be able to help in addition to the NHS interventions by signposting the employee towards services such as Employee Assistance Programmes, Online Physio, NHS Mental Health Apps etc if they have them available.

The employer will have to conduct regular reviews with the employee to manage both the ongoing health issue and work towards a healthy outcome.



What can you do to help yourself?

- Plan what you're going to do that day and don't over-exert yourself.
- **Try to break tasks into smaller chunks, and alternate easier and harder activities.**
- Consider the best time of the day to do certain activities based on your energy levels.
- **Frequent short rests are better than a few longer ones.**
- Try to rest before you become exhausted as opposed to becoming exhausted.
- **Don't stop doing things that make you feel breathless. Not using your muscles will make them weaker, which can make you more breathless when you try to use them.**
- Try to gradually increase the amount of exercise you do. Try going for short walks or doing simple strength exercises and build up from there.
- **Be kind to yourself, this is not your fault and be prepared that some days will be worse than others.**
- Connecting with other people can help you feel better – make sure to keep in touch with family, friends and also try to find some long covid support groups to share experiences.
- **Keeping to a daily routine can be good for your mood.**
- Try to stay active – continuing to move will help release endorphins and improve your mood.
- **If you are struggling with brain fog then make notes to help you remember things, especially at work.**
- It can help to make a clear plan before approaching a new problem or situation. Try breaking it down into smaller more achievable steps.
- **Flexibility exercises (like stretches, yoga and tai chi) and strength exercises (like climbing stairs, lifting weights and working with resistance bands) can help but don't forget to check with your doctor before starting an exercise regime.**



Police Mutual Services

Our Care Line Service provided by Health Assured can offer advice and information, helping with a range of concerns including emotional support. Take a look at the e-portal or download the APP.

Health & Wellbeing e-portal

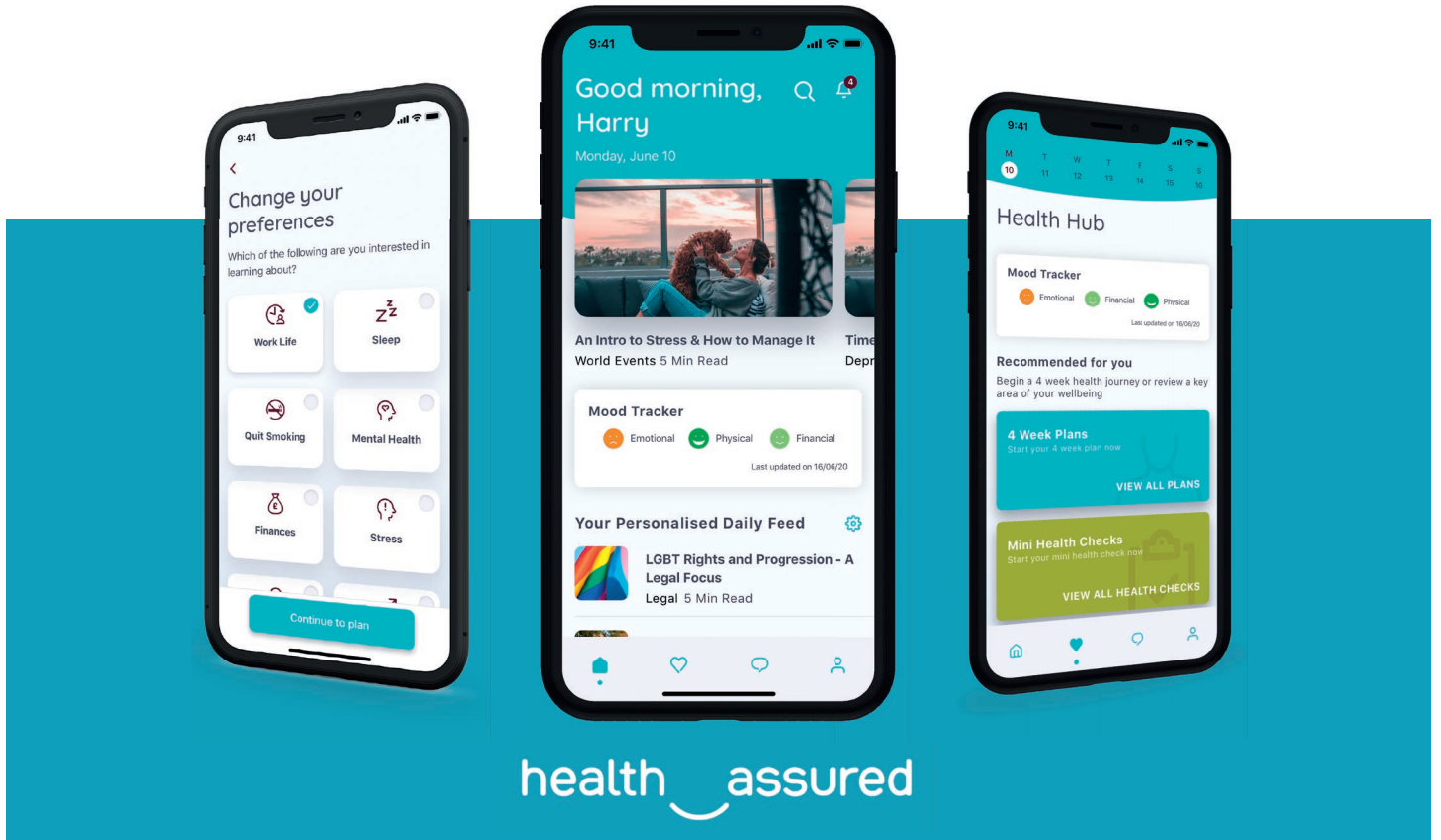
<https://healthassured.eap.co.uk>

Username: policemutual Password: careline

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They're able to advise you on a range of debt solutions suited to your individual circumstances, helping to protect you and your family with a sustainable way to manage your debt.

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