

'Brain fog' can linger with long-haul COVID

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As researchers work to learn more about COVID-19 and so-called long-haulers, a new study suggests "brain fog" can persist and even worsen for those who were infected months before.

Long-haulers continue to have symptoms long after their COVID diagnosis, and these symptoms can be mental as well as physical.

"People have trouble problem-solving, or they get in the car and forget where they're supposed to be going," said study author Leonard Jason, a psychologist at DePaul University in Chicago.

The researchers compared long-haulers' complaints with those with myalgic encephalomyelitis/[chronic fatigue syndrome](#) (ME/CFS). Patients with ME/CFS have long-term symptoms possibly triggered by the Epstein-Barr virus or for other unknown reasons.

The team defined long-haul COVID-19 as having serious, prolonged symptoms three months after contracting the virus.

The study included 278 long-haul COVID-19 patients who were asked about their symptoms at two points, six months apart.

Researchers also surveyed more than 500 ME/CFS patients about their symptoms, which have significant overlap with COVID-19.

At the six-month mark, COVID long-haulers reported worse neurocognitive symptoms than at the outset of their illness. This including trouble forming words, difficulty focusing and absent-mindedness.

Still, these symptoms were ranked less severe than those associated with ME/CFS.

Most other long-haul symptoms, including sleep problems, immune-related issues, pain and gastrointestinal issues, seemed to improve over time.

For both groups, the most severe [symptom](#) was malaise after exertion, which includes feeling physically and mentally drained or heavy.

Both sets of patients face similar challenges as their [family members](#) and [health care workers](#) may not understand the changing symptoms, according to the researchers.

"We don't know how many long-haulers will stay on this type of trajectory," said Jason, who is director of the Center for Community Research at DePaul.

He and other researchers estimate about 10% of people who have COVID-19 become long-haulers.

A review of past literature suggests that previous pandemics, including the 1918 Spanish flu, also led to long-term fatigue for many patients.

The U.S. National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke provided funding for this research. Findings were published online recently in the journal *Fatigue: Biomedicine, Health & Behavior*.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has [more on long-haul COVID](#).

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