

Expert shares 5 early care tips for people with long COVID

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After visiting with hundreds of patients with long COVID, also known as post-COVID syndrome, Greg Vanichkachorn, M.D., and his colleagues at Mayo Clinic have learned a lot about the early steps in recovery. That

includes the realization that there are steps people can take on their own to start recovering.

Here are five tips from Dr. Vanichkachorn on how to start defeating post-COVID syndrome:

1. Allow yourself time to recover

"One thing we have seen repeatedly is that [patients](#) push themselves too hard while trying to recover. It makes sense. Everyone is so eager to 'get back to normal life' after their infection and isolation," says Dr.

Vanichkachorn, director of Mayo Clinic's COVID Activity Rehabilitation Program and a physician in Mayo's Division of Public Health, Infectious Diseases, and Occupational Medicine.

Patients who try to return to their normal lifestyle too quickly experience a flare of fatigue, shortness of breath and muscle aches that can last for hours or days, Dr. Vanichkachorn says. That forces them to rest and can start a cycle of trying to resume normal life and experiencing setbacks that can leave them demoralized and deconditioned, he says.

"So, doctor's orders: Give yourself time to recover," Dr. Vanichkachorn says. "The fastest way to recover is to take things slow and easy at first, then try to gradually increase your activities."

Regular daily chores count as part of rehabilitation. For example, if you can wash one load of laundry a day without worsening your symptoms, wait until next week to try two loads, Dr. Vanichkachorn says. It is the same for [mental activity](#): Taking a break does not mean it's time to write that book you've been meaning to get to, he says.

2. Hydrate and eat healthy foods

"During the [acute infection](#), many patients aren't very hungry. This can be made worse if there are problems with taste and smell," Dr. Vanichkachorn says. "Some patients get used to this and forget the importance of good nutrition."

It is important to take in a good amount of hydration: 2.7 to 3.7 liters per day, he says.

With long COVID, physicians and researchers haven't found that any one diet is best, but it appears that extreme diets make things worse, says Dr. Vanichkachorn, who recommends a balanced, Mediterranean diet and avoiding processed and high-fat foods.

3. Focus on resistance activity

When patients exercise after COVID-19, they often try activities that elevate the [heart rate](#), such as walking and cycling, Dr. Vanichkachorn says.

"However, we find that cardiovascular exercise is the most difficult type of activity for patients with post-COVID syndrome. Instead, start with resistance activities, such as working with a resistance band, light free weights, yoga, or Pilates," he says. "Once this goes well, you can throw in some light cardio."

4. Optimize sleep

Many patients with long COVID take naps, disrupting [sleep schedules](#). It is important to get the best sleep possible, and that starts with making sure your sleep area is ideal, Dr. Vanichkachorn says.

Tips for better sleep include making sure the room has good air

circulation and is slightly cooler than it is during the day; minimizing electronic distractions such as using your phone in bed, which can keep your brain stimulated just enough to keep you awake; skipping caffeine after lunch; and avoiding exercise within two hours of sleep. It also helps to work toward a normal daytime schedule by waking up at a certain time, eating regular meals and having a routine bedtime, Dr. Vanichkachorn says.

5. Olfactory retraining

"About a third of patients have prolonged troubles with taste and smell after acute COVID infection. Fortunately, most patients will get better within 6 months, and even more within 12 months," Dr. Vanichkachorn says. "If you want to speed things up though, I recommend olfactory retraining."

This Mayo Clinic video shows how to start regaining your sense of smell:

"Fortunately, the ideal recovery from post-COVID syndrome starts with you in your home," Dr. Vanichkachorn says.

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