

Cognitive behavioral therapy shown to lessen post-viral fatigue after COVID-19

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Those with post-viral fatigue after suffering from COVID-19 benefit from cognitive behavioral therapy, resulting in less fatigue and concentration problems. Lead researcher, Hans Knoop, Professor of

Medical Psychology at Amsterdam UMC found that "after behavioral therapy, patients not only had fewer symptoms but also functioned better both physically and socially. Those improvements were still present even after six months." The research from Amsterdam UMC, RadboudUMC and three other hospitals is published in *Clinical Infectious Diseases*.

After a COVID-19 infection, a substantial number of patients report persisting symptoms. This is often known as long-COVID or Post-COVID Syndrome and the most common [symptom](#) is severe and debilitating [fatigue](#). In the ReCOVER study, patients who received [cognitive behavioral therapy](#) were compared with patients who received care as usual. Normal care often consisted of supervision by their GP or specialist, physiotherapy and/or [occupational therapy](#).

Cognitive behavioral therapy for patients with persistent fatigue after COVID-19 focuses on reducing fatigue by dealing with the symptoms differently. "Together with patients, we look, for example, at how they can improve their sleep-wake rhythm. We also help them become more active again with small, safe steps. For example, by going for short walks," says Knoop.

Improving concentration

Cognitive behavioral therapy has clear results for these [patients](#). Most participants experienced significantly less fatigue and improved concentration after treatment. They also made significant progress socially and physically. The results also proved to be stable over time. After six months, the differences, compared with those received regular care, were still present. "Cognitive behavioral therapy also appears to be a safe treatment. Our research shows that the symptoms did not worsen, and new symptoms arose less often," adds Knoop.

The researchers emphasize that the fact that behavioral therapy can help

does not mean that the cause of the symptoms is psychological. Furthermore, not everyone benefits from behavioral therapy.

It is therefore very important to continue to search for other effective treatments and the physical causes of the post-COVID syndrome.

More information: Efficacy of cognitive behavioral therapy targeting severe fatigue following COVID-19: results of a randomized controlled trial, *Clinical Infectious Diseases* (2023).

Provided by University of Amsterdam

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