

Overcoming long COVID: a patient story

Patient X (who wishes to remain anonymous), a retired teacher and mum of three from Hornchurch, recalls her experience of Long Covid and her journey to recovery.

“I became ill on 26 December 2020, together with many other members of my family. I recall feeling unwell and although I had no cough or cold symptoms, I just felt out of it. After testing positive for Covid, the initial set of symptoms lasted for around two weeks.”

Recalling her experience, she says: “Things really came to a head two weeks after that diagnosis, when my family had to call for an ambulance. Looking back, they told me that I just didn’t look right and had become unresponsive and was making ‘grunting’ noises. I also remember passing more water than I usually would.”

After being transferred to Queen's Hospital in Romford, the NHS staff looking after me told me I had low blood oxygen and I was in hospital for two weeks under the care of the various NHS staff who looked after me. I came very close to being put on a CPAP machine.” (A CPAP machine delivers a stream of oxygenated air into your airways through a mask and a tube.)

Her symptoms began to slowly improve and shortly after she was transferred to a Covid Ward, where her oxygen levels slowly began to recover.

Since being discharged from hospital, many of the symptoms have persisted and she was formally diagnosed with Long Covid by her GP.

Long COVID is diagnosed when symptoms from a COVID infection continue after 12 weeks and cannot be explained by an alternative diagnosis. Symptoms can vary a lot, fluctuate over time and may have an impact on your ability to do your day-to-day activities. She says that she is around 85% back to her usual pre-Covid self.

“Ever since I was diagnosed with Covid, even today I am not fully recovered. I’ve had issues with my memory and brain fog and can’t remember the times my family visited me in hospital, despite being awake and responsive. I also get tired easily and suffer from fatigue.

“My day to day has changed I would say. I can’t do things I used to do like going to the park for the day or going on shopping trips. My family also gets annoyed sometimes because I repeat myself in conversations as I forget the details of chats we’ve already had.”

I’ve had a good experience of the NHS Long Covid clinic and feel honoured to have been able to access these services. Initially, I had 2 or 3 telephone consultations with the doctor, followed up by care from the occupation therapist and the physiotherapist team which has helped. The occupational therapy in particular has been the helpful as it’s taught me to pace myself and they provided me with mental health support.

“I have also been referred to the NHS gym membership programme and hope to continue with this so I can I feel stronger.”

Common symptoms to look out for include:

- extreme tiredness
- depression and anxiety
- breathlessness
- fast heart beat
- widespread pain
- chest pain or tightness
- changes in taste and smell
- changes in sleep/difficulty sleeping
- pins and needles
- difficulty concentrating and memory

If you think you have any of these symptoms, please speak to your doctor.

For more information on our long COVID services, visit:

<https://www.eastlondonhcp.nhs.uk/ourplans/long-covid-2.htm>