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Covid-19 Rehabilitation for Physical And Mental Health

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Although most people make a full recovery from COVID-19, some can develop complications. COVID-19 rehabilitation focuses on helping people regain their physical and cognitive abilities after the illness.

COVID-19 can affect the body in a variety of ways. While 81% of people experience mild to moderate illness and recover without treatment, 14% develop severe symptoms that can last several weeks or months.

Some people also go on to develop "long COVID," which occurs when COVID-19 symptoms linger for weeks or months after acquiring the initial infection. Some people refer to this group as "long haulers."

People who are recovering from severe illness, or who have long COVID, may require rehabilitation to manage the aftereffects of COVID-19. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), these include:

- lung damage
- heart damage or inflammation, such as myocarditis or pericarditis
- cognitive impairments that affect memory or concentration
- conditions that affect the blood vessels, such as clotting
- lasting effects from complications, such as heart attacks, stroke, or pulmonary embolism
- anxiety, depression, or trauma
- muscle or joint pain
- chronic fatigue

People who required ventilation while they had COVID-19 may experience further complications, such as delirium or injury to the airways. Lasting fatigue or long stays in an intensive care unit (ICU) can also weaken the muscles due to the prolonged rest.

One of the types of rehabilitation that may help people recovering from COVID-19 and its long-term effects is physical therapy.

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Physical rehabilitation

Some people who recover from COVID-19 may need physical rehabilitation to help them resume normal activities after staying in the hospital or following periods of prolonged isolation.

Physical therapy can help those with decreased strength begin to move more, gradually building up their stamina. According to a 2020 review, physical therapy for those recovering from COVID-19 aims to:

- restore function to the muscles
- reduce the likelihood of mental health conditions that may occur as a result of limited mobility
- enable people to return to their normal lives

How physical therapists achieve this depends on a person's unique circumstances and stage of recovery. If they are still in the hospital, this can involve:

- helping people learn to change positions in bed
- performing passive joint motion, which consists of a therapist moving someone's body for them
- teaching stretches a person can do in bed or at their bedside
- helping people practice walking without aid

After someone leaves the hospital, a physical therapist may recommend:

- aerobic exercises that people can do around the home, such as walking up and down the stairs
- low-intensity resistance training, such as squats or carrying objects
- balance training

Postexertional malaise

It is important to note that many people with long COVID report that exercise can temporarily worsen their symptoms. This is known as postexertional malaise (PEM). For this reason, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) in the United Kingdom advise doctors not to use graded exercise therapy to treat people with long COVID.

If a person notices their symptoms worsen during or after exercise, they should stop the activity and rest. It is important for anyone recovering from COVID-19 to carefully pace their exercise so they do not experience PEM, injury, or other side effects.

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Summary

The cognitive, physical, and pulmonary effects of COVID-19 are numerous, affecting each person differently. Rehabilitation from this disease may involve consulting multiple specialists, depending on the impact of the illness.

Physical therapists, respiratory physiotherapists, and psychologists could all help people regain function and improve quality of life.

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