

Vademecum

Back to work



Part 1: Understanding employees affected by Long COVID

Authors

Bieri, Manuela.

Long Covid Schweiz

Dr. Rangelov, Natalie.

Altea Long COVID Network

Rudolf, Pia. Sulser&Partner AG

Case Management und berufliche Integration

Scherrer, Florian.

Simonet, Arnaud.

Utiger, Alexandra.

Long Covid Schweiz



Back to work- Part 1: Understanding employees affected by Long COVID

What does it mean when someone is suffering from Long COVID?

People affected by Long COVID are faced with a number of different problems. They are frequently restricted by their [illness](#) in all aspects of their [daily life](#), whether during their day-to-day activities or in their relationships, their hobbies or their work. It's important that people affected by Long COVID receive adequate support when returning to work. For those affected, the biggest challenges when returning to the world of work are [post-exertional malaise \(PEM\)](#), [cognitive impairment](#) and [fatigue](#).

Given the complexity of Long COVID, even experienced employers find it challenging to reintegrate those affected into the workplace. This Vademecum has been created to explain what Long COVID actually is, how the symptoms impact the working lives of those affected, and when those affected will be ready to return to the workplace. A second Vademecum provides tips and advice on how to make reintegration easier for everyone involved, and answers questions such as "What do employers need to be aware of?" or "How can those affected be best supported when returning to the workplace?"

What are the symptoms of Long COVID?

As mentioned earlier, people with Long COVID have a range of problems to deal with and treatment is difficult, owing to the variety of symptoms and their complexity. [A list of symptoms](#) can be found on the Long Covid Schweiz Website. An explanation of

Attention note

The work situation and the state of health of each affected person is different. This is why the recommendations below are to be seen as generic and should be adapted where required.



symptom groups can be found on the Altea Long COVID Network, as can a [Vademecum and tips for treatment](#) of some symptoms (yellowbuttons). How symptoms manifest themselves and for how long varies greatly from person to person.

When returning to work, **post-exertional malaise** is the main symptom that needs to be taken into account. Other important symptoms include:

- ✧ Excess tiredness and exhaustion (fatigue)
- ✧ Shortness of breath and breathing difficulties
- ✧ Cognitive problems (such as concentration difficulties, unusual forgetfulness, slower thought processes, difficulty seeing and talking)
- ✧ Aches and pains following physical exertion

What does it mean to suffer with post-exertional malaise as part of Long COVID?

When it comes to integrating people suffering from Long COVID back into the workplace, it is important to pay particular attention to their **physical, cognitive, and energy-related limitations**, taking into account their professional activities. People with Long COVID frequently suffer from **post-exertional malaise** (PEM), which means: **Following physical, mental, or emotional exertion, they experience a worsening of their symptoms**, also known as a **“crash”**. PEM is a symptom that cannot be compared to the “normal” fatigue experienced by a healthy person following an activity, a period of excitement or exertion. It is important to detect PEM early, as this can help reduce crashes and make day-to-day exertions safer. You can read more about PEM [in this vademecum](#) and [in this presentation](#).

Along with PEM, another very common symptom of Long COVID is extreme **fatigue**. Pacing can help in the management of this symptom. To put it simply, this means that you should do less than your strength allows. [Pacing](#) is a **careful use of one’s own resources** - on a physical, mental, and emotional level. The art of it involves **finding the optimal balance between** rest and activity. The aim is to prevent crashes and achieve a [stable energy level in everyday life](#) (in German) which in turn leads to a better quality of life. This means that those affected need to learn how to manage their energy on a day-to-day basis - including in the workplace. It is



therefore desirable that employers accommodate their employees in this situation and **enable appropriate energy management.**

Another aspect to consider is that a relatively minor symptom, such as hair loss or loss of smell, can lead to bigger problems, such as anxiety or loss of appetite. A loss of taste or smell is certainly annoying in one's private life, but it can become a real problem for certain professionals, such as chefs, whose senses of smell and taste are essential to their work. It is therefore extremely important that those affected feel understood and that their concerns are not trivialized.

How long does Long COVID last?

According to the [WHO \(World Health Organization\)](#) a "Post-COVID-19 condition" is present when a person with suspected or confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection experiences symptoms within three months of infection, **these symptoms persist for at least two months** and **cannot be explained by other causes.**

However, there is currently no data regarding how long it can last. Some people recover after a few months, whereas others continue to suffer for more than a year. This means that **it is not possible to predict the duration of Long COVID**, but it must be understood that a **very long recovery phase** may be needed. It is also important to consider that recovery is not always linear.

When is someone affected by Long COVID ready to go back to (some form of) work?

The capacity to work is different for everyone and depends on a range of different factors, including the extent of post-exertional malaise, the symptoms experienced by the affected person, the severity of these symptoms, the type of work, the skills required by the work, the working hours, and many more. If a person is ready to return to (some form of) work, this doesn't mean that they are completely back to full health.



If the person meets the following criteria, it may be possible for them to re-enter the world of work.

- ✿ The person is physically and cognitively capable
- ✿ They can manage the commute to work and are able to be present during working hours
- ✿ They can demonstrate the required professional qualifications in line with the requirements of the workplace
- ✿ They can use and implement the skills they possessed before their illness to carry out their previous tasks

In the second part of the Vademecum you will find tips on how work integration can be simplified.



Links

Links mentioned in the Vademecum

Long COVID - what is it exactly?

www.altea-network.com/en/long-covid/what-is-long-covid/

Social Impact of Long COVID

<https://www.altea-network.com/en/long-covid/society/>

Vademecum Post Exertional Malaise (PEM), recognize and prevent "crashes"

www.altea-network.com/en/long-covid/vademecum/fatigue/#pem-postexertional-malaise

Vademecum Thinking and perceptions

www.altea-network.com/en/long-covid/vademecum/thinking-and-perception/

Vademecum Fatigue

<https://www.altea-network.com/en/long-covid/vademecum/fatigue/>

Long Covid Schweiz. "Liste of Symptoms" (in German and French)

<https://long-covid-info.ch/krankheit/#symptome>

Long COVID Symptoms and Vademecum Overview

www.altea-network.com/en/long-covid/symptoms-overview/

Berner Reha Zentrum. "Post-Exertional-Malaise" (in German)

https://long-covid-info.ch/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Post-ExertionalMalaise_Berner-Reha-Zentrum.pdf

Vademecum Pacing

<https://www.altea-network.com/en/long-covid/vademecum/fatigue/#pacing>

Long Covid Schweiz. "Pacing" (in German)

<https://www.long-covid-info.ch/behandlung/>



WHO. "A clinical case definition of post COVID-19 condition by a Delphi consensus, 6 October 2021"

https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Post_COVID-19_condition-Clinical_case_definition-2021.1

Additional links

Berner Reha Zentrum. «Post Exertional Malaise» (in German)

<https://www.rehabern.ch/>

Long Covid Schweiz. (in German and French)

<https://www.long-covid-info.ch>

Netzwerk Case Management Schweiz. (in German)

<https://www.netzwerk-cm.ch/>

References

Federal Office of Public Health FOPH. (2022). Coronavirus : Post COVID-19 condition.

<https://www.bag.admin.ch/bag/de/home/krankheiten/ausbrueche-epidemien-pandemien/aktuelle-ausbrueche-epidemien/novel-cov/krankheit-symptome-behandlung-ursprung/long-covid.html>

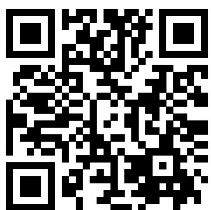
Netzwerk-CM Schweiz. (2022). Fachwissen. Netzwerk Case Management Schweiz.

<https://www.netzwerk-cm.ch/>

Rehaklinik Bellikon. (2022). Centre of expertise for occupational reintegration.

<https://www.rehabellikon.ch/kompetenzzentrum-%20berufliche-eingliederung/>

Long Covid Schweiz



info@long-covid-info.ch

[long-covid-info.ch](https://www.long-covid-info.ch)

Sulser & Partner



info@sulserpartner.ch

www.sulserpartner.ch

Altea Long COVID Network



hello@altea-network.com

www.altea-network.com

