

- COVID-19

Long Covid can impair quality of life more than advanced cancers, study says

The Guardian Australia · 9 Jun 2023 · 40 · Rachel Hall

Many people with long Covid have a lower health-related quality of life than people with some advanced cancers, research suggests.



Fatigue is the symptom with the greatest impact on the daily lives of long Covid patients, according to a study led by researchers at University College London (UCL) and the University of Exeter. They found that many were seriously ill and had fatigue scores worse than or similar to people with cancer-related anaemia or severe kidney disease.

Their health-related quality of life scores were also lower than those of people with advanced metastatic cancers, such as stage 4 lung cancer. Overall, the impact of long Covid on the daily activities of patients was worse than that for stroke patients and comparable to people with Parkinson's disease.

The study co-author Prof William Henley, of Exeter University medical school, said: "Long Covid is an invisible condition, and many people are left trying to manage significant changes to how they can function. "Shockingly, our research has revealed that long Covid can leave people with worse fatigue and quality of life than some cancers, yet the support and understanding is not at the same level. We urgently need more research to enable the development of evidencebased services to support people trying to manage this debilitating new condition."

Earlier research suggests that up to about 17% of people who get Covid develop long Covid. According to the Office for National Statistics, about 1.4 million people in the UK had symptoms of long Covid as of July 2022. The UCL and Exeter research, published in the journal *BMJ Open* and funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), looked at more than 3,750 patients who were referred to a long Covid clinic after experiencing symptoms for at least 12 weeks after infection.

Patients were asked to complete questionnaires on an app about how long Covid was affecting them, including its impact on their day-to-day activities, levels of fatigue, depression, anxiety, breathlessness, brain fog, and their quality of life.

More than 90% of long Covid patients using the app were of working age (18–65) and 51% said they had been unable to work for at least one day in the previous month, with 20% unable to work at all. Nearly three-quarters (71%) of the patients were female.

Dr Henry Goodfellow, a researcher at the UCL Institute of Epidemiology and Health who co-led the study, said: "Our results have found that long Covid can have a devastating effect on the lives of patients – with fatigue having the biggest impact on everything from social activities to work, chores and maintaining close relationships."

Goodfellow said the team hoped that a greater understanding of long Covid symptoms would help the NHS and policymakers to better "target limited resources" to improve treatment options, including focusing clinical care and rehabilitation services on addressing fatigue.