



RACING HEART OR CHEST PAIN? HEART PROBLEMS AFTER COVID-19

LONG COVID ESSENTIALS: A SERIES BY The Sick Times × LONG COVID JUSTICE

COVID-19 can trigger a host of problems affecting the heart. It can also increase your risk of future cardiovascular trouble. Even more than a year after COVID-19, a [major study](#) found people were more likely to experience a heart attack, heart disease, and abnormal heart rhythms — issues that can be life-threatening.

If you have symptoms of a [heart attack](#), which include chest pain and pressure spreading to the arms, back, neck, or jaw, go to the emergency room immediately.

Some conditions linked to COVID-19 include:

- **Myocarditis and Pericarditis:** Myocarditis is inflammation of the heart muscle. Pericarditis is inflammation of the tissue surrounding the heart. Both can happen when the immune system causes inflammation in response to an infection. Symptoms can include chest pain and shortness of breath.
- **Coronary artery disease:** COVID-19 can infect the [arteries of the heart](#) and cause plaque inside the arteries to become inflamed. This disease may happen without symptoms but sometimes causes chest pain and shortness of breath.
- **Arrhythmias:** Inflammation can lead to an irregular heart rhythm. Atrial fibrillation is one type of [abnormal heart rhythm](#). This can feel like fluttering, pounding, or a racing heartbeat.
- **Heart attacks:** Heart attack deaths have [spiked during](#) the pandemic — especially among young people — and tracked with surges in COVID-19 cases.

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* GETTING HELP

A cardiologist can diagnose and treat heart problems. They may order tests like an [EKG](#), an [echocardiogram](#), or a [heart MRI](#), which can help check for abnormal heartbeats, inflammation, and more. Depending on the diagnosis, there may be some available treatments.

If you can't see a doctor right away, you can monitor your heart rate with [a pulse oximeter](#). If you're having heart symptoms, try to rest and avoid strenuous exercise until a medical professional has cleared you. **Important note: Sometimes, these meters may give incorrect results in people with darker skin. Please talk to a medical provider if you have questions or concerns about the oximeter readings.**

* DYSAUTONOMIA

A fast heart rate, dizziness, and/or feeling like you're going to faint are common symptoms of Long COVID. This might indicate problems with the nervous system which affects your heart, called dysautonomia.

One of the most common forms of this in people with Long COVID is called postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome, or POTS. Read more about it in [our dysautonomia and POTS resource](#).

* RESOURCES

- [Heart Problems After Covid](#) – Cleveland Clinic
- [Long-term cardiovascular outcomes of Covid-19](#)– Nature Medicine
- [Covid-19 Surges Linked to Spike in Heart Attacks](#)– Cedars Sinai
- [Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome](#)– Dysautonomia International
- [The Problem with Pulse Oximeters: A Long History of Racial Bias](#)– John Hopkins

* **FULL SERIES OF FACTSHEETS WITH LINKED RESOURCES + MORE:**

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* **QUESTIONS?** connect@s4hi.org

This series was designed by people living with Long COVID and associated diseases. Each resource sheet has been reviewed by patient and medical experts. This is an informational resource, not medical advice. Publication date: 9/16/2024.