



HEALTH & WELLNESS / LIFESTYLE

## COVID Long Haulers: Tips and Insights

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James K. walks his pups by my door daily, so it has been easy to track his recovery from Covid since last October. A bodybuilder in his 50s, James lost about 12 lbs during a 10-day bout with Covid. "It was a blur," he says today. Coughing fits were so severe every time he stood up, he spent most of those days sleeping or lying prone to ease breathing and pain. James says he feels his lungs aren't working to full capacity even today. He hasn't had the energy to resume weight training.

I'm encouraging him to do conscious inhaling and gave him sprigs of rosemary from my garden to sniff during his daily breathing exercises, and some key self-*shiatsu*. He admits the smell of rosemary is less important than the ritual it prompts. He's also doing job interviews, as the company he worked for went out of business during his Covid spell. Both factors caused "a complete lifestyle change."

Another local buddy, banker Natasha J, was ill for six weeks with Covid some months ago. "Brain fog is still a big issue," she says. "I just find myself sitting and not sure how much time passed or what I was thinking about for so long."



Adds Natasha, "My senses of smell and taste are back, but have changed. My sense of taste is delicate to spice, which is strange, as I've always loved spice. And my sense of smell is hypersensitive."

### I Can't Breathe

A quick email / WhatsApp poll of my global family and friends again confirmed a general lingering exhaustion following Covid recovery and ongoing breathing problems. An asthmatic second cousin in the U.K. was floored by Covid. She relieved symptoms with a family favorite - repeatedly gargling with warm water and salt. This reminded me of a day years ago when I knelt in the rolling surf on a beach in Cornwall and inhaled sea water repeatedly to clear severe nasal/sinus congestion.

For all with lingering breathing difficulties, apart from encouraging salt water and favorite fragrances, I suggest repeated activation of Lung 1/2, LI 20, UB 10 and ST 3. I text patients self-*shiatsu* photographs of the points. I WhatsApp regularly with a cousin in the U.K. suffering from "crippling depression" because of isolation and inability to see a daughter and grandkids for a year because of Covid and quarantining.

In short, we can all learn a lot from family and friends, especially about the "long haulers" many in Asian medicine will be treating in the months / years ahead. It is vital to share our tips and experimentation, especially with a creative use of the five elements going forward.

Currently, lingering symptoms bounce survivors from one baffled medical specialist to the next, who suggest similarities ranging anywhere from chronic fatigue syndrome to dysautonomia (disconnect between brain and normal functions). Both *The New York Times*<sup>1</sup> and *The Washington Post*<sup>2</sup> have

published detailed first-person stories recently that add depth far beyond the glaring statistics.

Meet Sarah J. (82): Retired Dancer, Yoga Teacher & Covid Survivor

Nini Melvin, director of Pathways to the Heart *shiatsu* school in Northampton, Mass., shared details of Sarah J., who lives alone in an apartment and recently survived a Covid bout of over four months thanks to constant communication with Nini and others. No one could visit her, but friends arranged food deliveries from her favorite restaurants via a neighbor. Says Nini, "We kept her laughing and also delivered Netflix movies."

She also advised Sarah to roll onto her belly to help ease breathing difficulties "as a way of bringing the umbilicus back to earth," according to Nini.

To augment Sarah's long-distant care, Nini reached out to a homeopath in Hawaii, who recommended a special drink to help with dehydration, and to restore smell and taste. (Mix a pinch of baking soda, a teaspoon of sea salt, juice of an entire lemon and a third of a cup of honey with a quart of room-temp water, to be sipped each day for 5-7 days.)

Nini also praised backup remedies from the (Swiss) Olbas family of cough syrup, inhalers and pastilles, all of which helped in the earlier stages. Nini also advised Sarah to rub tiger balm on her chest and then apply a hot-water bottle. For coughing fits, Nini recommended applying tiger balm to Lung 1/2.

It was also interesting to hear Nini describing a friend's protective measure during a flight home to the U.S. recently. She mixed a paste of 2-3 oz. of ghee with 4-6 drops of tea tree oil and rubbed it in her nostrils as a way of disinfecting every inhalation. Long term, this also helps with breathing difficulties and as a way of propelling the sense of smell.

The Shadow Pandemic

The World Health Organization warns us to be aware of the increase in domestic violence and addictions.<sup>3</sup> Several of my colleagues in acupuncture and ABT here in Austin [Elizabeth Gomes, LAc, RN; Isabelle Chen Angliker, LAc, MD (Switzerland); and Alighta Averbukh, LAc] have all noted increasing addictive behavior in clients. Isabelle's advice: "healthy snacks, like apples and raw almonds; also, increased movement, and walking, stretching, yoga with videos. Replace cigarettes with art projects for sensory input, to please all five senses (different for each client)." She also emphasizes auricular acupuncture.

Alighta recommends tapping involving specific acupoints / meridians. She advises clients to download tapping apps off Apple or Android.<sup>4</sup>

The Need for Outreach Isn't Going Away Soon

Changes in medical education have been drastic<sup>5</sup> as schools grapple with Zoom and other solutions around much of the hands-on training that typifies both Western and Asian medical schools.<sup>6</sup> Outreach programs have become all-important for AOMA in Austin as we battled the additional aftermath of crippling ice storms, power outages and burst pipes at the end of February.

Says Mary Faria, PhD, AOMA's president and CEO, "We are developing herbal and other items we can

package through our retail stores for stress management. And we are planning ways we can focus our community wellness hour to support health care workers and first responders."

*Editor's Note:* Some names in this article have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals.

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