

“Post COVID syndrome for Primary Care and Community Healthcare Professionals.”

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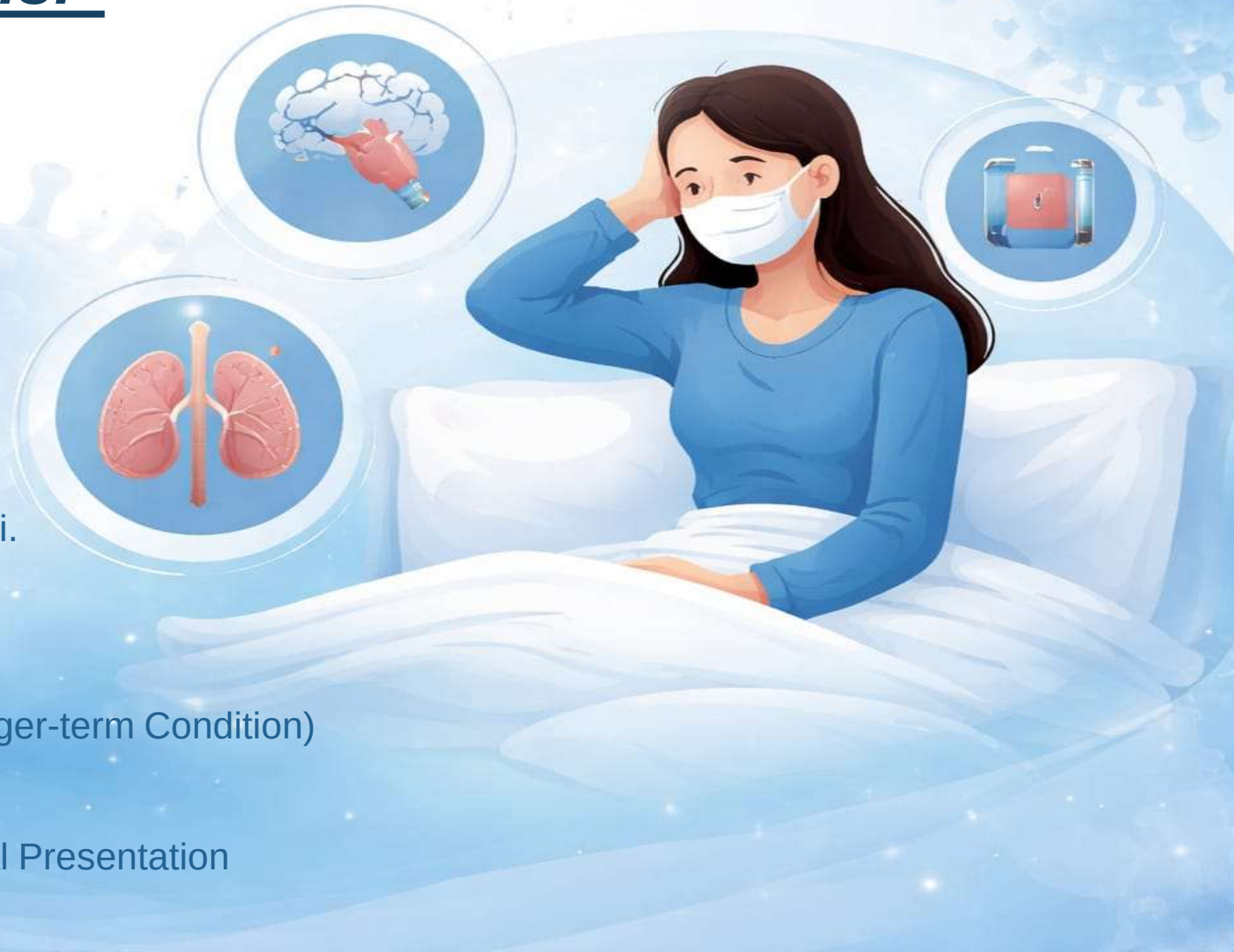
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Overview

- ❖ **Definition:**

COVID-19 can lead to serious long-term effects, known as post COVID-19 condition (PCC).

- ❖ This is also sometimes called long covid.(WHO, 2025)
- ❖ Post COVID-19 condition is defined by having a range of symptoms that mostly occur within 3 months from the initial illness of COVID-19 and then persist for a minimum of 2 months.
- ❖ Working or driving is often affected by PCC and doing house work or other activities around the house can be difficult.
- ❖ Worldwide estimates of 6 cases with post COVID-19 condition per 100 people with COVID-19.
- ❖ The three elements of skills, values and behaviours within practice all contribute to co-productive and patient-centred care that is required to manage long term conditions such as Long Covid.

POST-COVID SYNDROME (LONG COVID)

Persistence of symptoms beyond 4-12 weeks
after COVID-19 infection



Potential Causes

- Immune system dysfunction • Chronic inflammation
- Organ damage • Viral persistence
- Viral persistence

Causes of Long COVID (Post-COVID Syndrome)

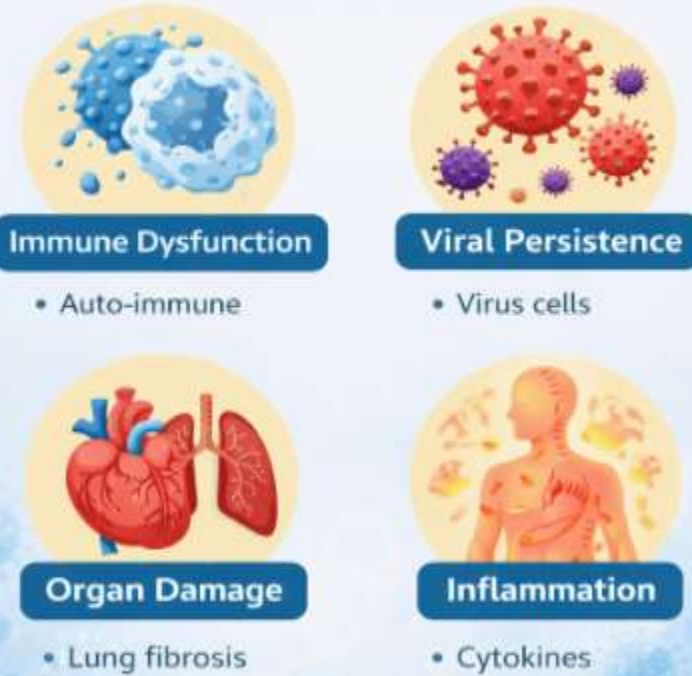


Figure : 01> Post COVID Syndrome Symptoms and Aetiology
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UK and Worldwide Prevalence

- ❖ Approximately 1.9 million people are affected in the UK (ONS, 2023)
- ❖ Globally, 10–20% of COVID-19 patients develop Long COVID. (WHO, 2023)
- ❖ More common in women and middle-aged adults.
- ❖ Symptoms may persist for more than 12 months in some cases.
- ❖ Higher prevalence in women and middle-aged adults.

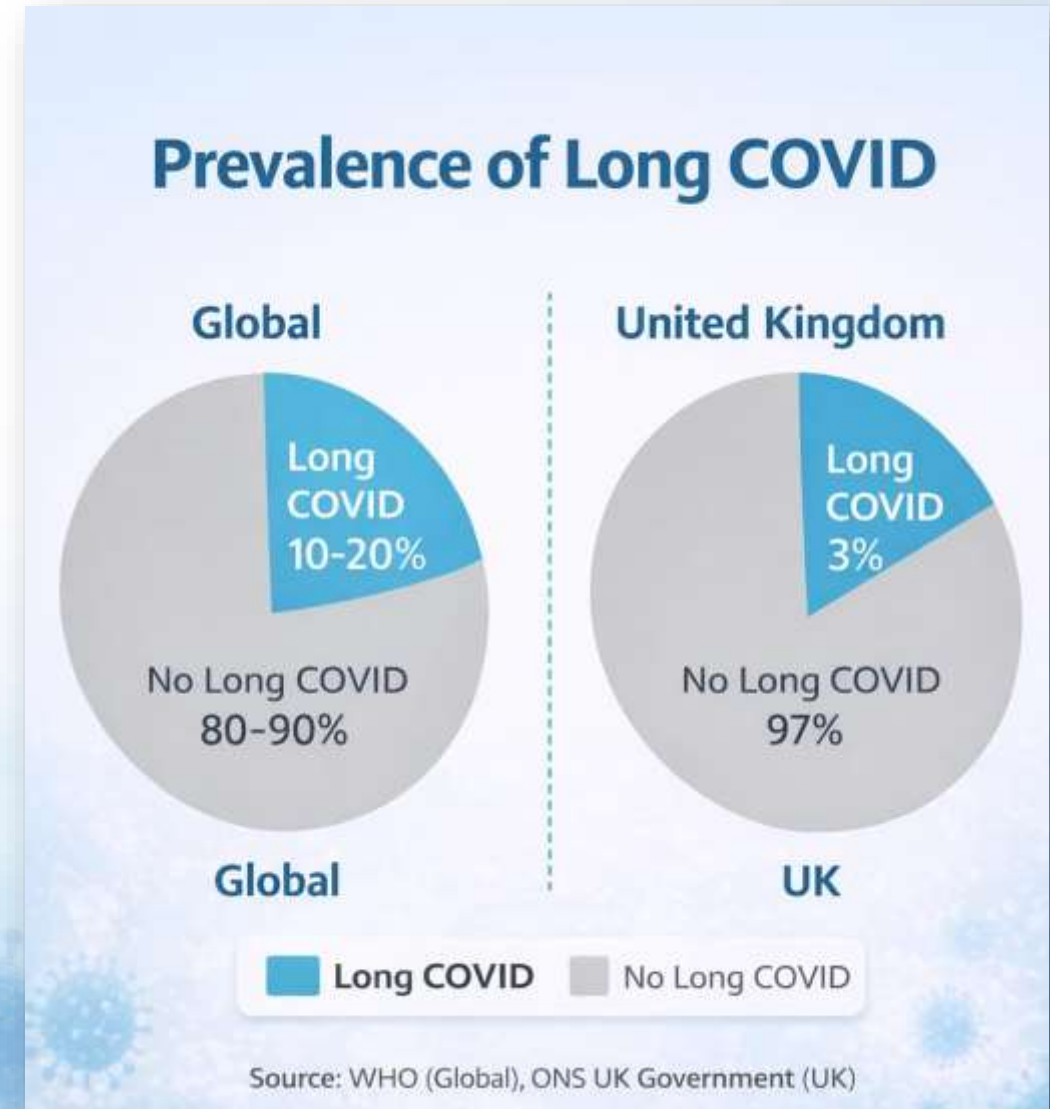


Figure:02> Prevalence of Long COVID; WHO (Global), ONS UK Government (UK)

Economic and Social Burdens

Economic Burdens	Social Burdens
❖ Increased NHS costs and service demand. ❖ Loss of productivity and long-term sick leave. ❖ Pressure on primary care services	❖ Reduced quality of life. ❖ Mental health challenges. ❖ Social isolation and dependency

Diagnosis and Initial Assessment

❖ Diagnosis

- Symptoms lasting >12 weeks after COVID-19
- No specific test → clinical diagnosis
- Diagnosis of exclusion
- Primary care is first point of contact

❖ Initial Assessment

- Patient history and symptom review
- Physical and mental health assessment
- Basic investigations (blood tests, oxygen levels)
- Holistic, patient- centred approach.

(NICE,2020 and NHS England,2022)

Management



- ❖ Focus is on symptom-based and holistic care.
- ❖ Patients are managed through a multidisciplinary team (MDT).
- ❖ Primary care professionals coordinate care and monitor progress.

❖ Role of Primary Care

- ❖ First point of contact (GPs, community nurses)
- ❖ Identify and assess symptoms
- ❖ Provide initial management and reassurance
- ❖ Refer to specialist services when needed
- ❖ Ongoing follow-up and support

Treatment Options (UK – Multiple Source)

- ❖ In the UK, treatment of Post-COVID Syndrome focuses on managing symptoms rather than providing a single cure, as there is currently no definitive treatment available (NICE, 2020; Greenhalgh et al., 2020).
- ❖ Fatigue, which is one of the most common symptoms, is managed using pacing and energy conservation techniques to prevent symptom worsening (NHS, 2023; BMJ, 2021).
- ❖ Breathlessness is addressed through pulmonary rehabilitation programmes and breathing exercises, which have been shown to improve respiratory function (NHS England, 2022; WHO, 2023).
- ❖ Patients experiencing cognitive difficulties, such as brain fog, may benefit from cognitive rehabilitation and structured support (NIHR, 2021).
- ❖ Mental health support is also essential, including cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and treatment for anxiety and depression (NICE, 2020; Holmes et al., 2020).
- ▶ The provision of rehabilitation services, such as physiotherapy and occupational therapy, aim to reintroduce patients to activities of daily living (NHS England, 2022; Royal College of Occupational Therapists, 2021)

Primary Care Role & Ongoing Support (Multiple Sources)

- ❖ Primary care and community healthcare providers are usually the first point of contact and coordinate long-term care for individuals with Long COVID Syndrome, thus they are in a key position to support patients (NHS England, 2022; Greenhalgh et al., 2020).
- ❖ They are responsible for assessing symptoms, providing initial treatment, and referring patients to multidisciplinary teams when required (NICE, 2020; NIHR, 2021)
- ❖ Ongoing monitoring and follow-up are essential to ensure recovery and prevent complications (WHO, 2023).
- ❖ Supported self-management is encouraged, including goal setting, symptom tracking, and accessing community-based services such as social prescribing (NHS, 2023; RCOT, 2021).
- ❖ There is currently limited evidence for pharmacological treatment, and medications are mainly used for symptom relief rather than cure (BMJ, 2021; NICE, 2020).
- ❖ Overall, a holistic and patient-centred approach is recommended to improve long-term outcomes (WHO, 2023; NHS England, 2022).

Comorbidities Associated with Post COVID Syndrome

- ❖ Post-COVID Syndrome can be accompanied by a variety of additional conditions that can exacerbate patient symptoms and slow recovery.
- ❖ In the UK, individuals with pre-existing conditions including diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular disease were found to be more likely to experience longer lasting symptoms of Long COVID (ONS, 2023; NICE, 2020).
- ❖ Breathing problems including asthma and COPD may enhance the severity of breathlessness, and other breathing symptoms (NHS, 2023).
- ❖ Pre-existing, mental health problems such as anxiety and depression, are prevalent among Long COVID patients and may be both a cause and effect of Long COVID (WHO, 2023; BMJ, 2021).
- ❖ Furthermore, obesity was also established as a risk factor, that causes increased inflammation and longer recovery times (NIHR, 2021)
- ❖ For primary care and community healthcare professionals, recognizing these comorbidities is essential for providing holistic and personalized care.
- ❖ Identifying comorbidities helps primary care professionals provide holistic care.



Figure: 03> Comorbidities
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Prevention

Primary Prevention, Secondary Prevention and Tertiary Prevention

- ❖ This diagram shows the three levels of prevention in public health, which aim to reduce the impact of diseases like Post-COVID Syndrome. (Ochs et al.2024; WHO,2023)
- ❖ Primary prevention focuses on preventing the disease before it occurs through measures such as vaccination, hygiene, and health education.(Public Health Scotland,2023; NHS,2023)
- ❖ Secondary prevention, involves detection and treatment of the condition at an early stage, and thereby reducing the severity of the condition and preventing complications. (NICE, 2020)
- ❖ Tertiary prevention aims to manage long-term effects through rehabilitation, ongoing support, and improving quality of life.(NIHR,2021)

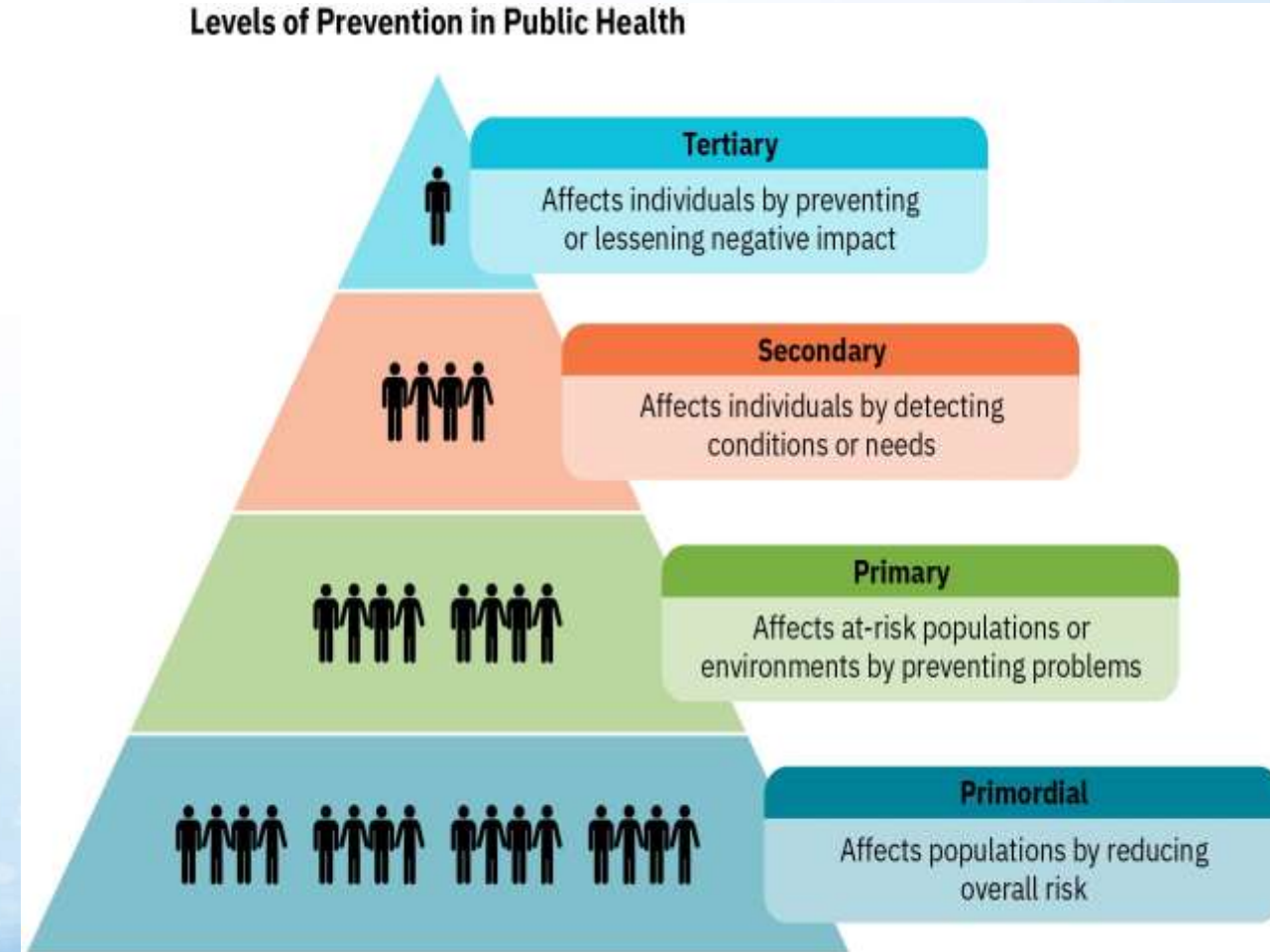


Figure: 04>Levels of Preventions in Public Health,
Ochs et al.(2024)

Skills, Values and Behaviours

- ❖ Effective management of Post-COVID Syndrome requires healthcare professionals to demonstrate strong clinical assessment and communication skills, particularly in primary care where patients first present with complex and varied symptoms (NICE, 2020; NHS England, 2022).
- ❖ Healthcare professionals must adopt values such as empathy, respect, and patient- centred care, as many Long COVID symptoms are subjective and may not always be visible (WHO, 2023).
- ❖ A key behaviour in co-productive care is active listening and shared decision-making, which ensures that patients are involved in their care planning and feel supported throughout their recovery (NICE, 2020).
- ❖ Overall, integrating skills, values, and behaviours into practice supports co-productive and patient- centred care, which is crucial for managing long-term conditions like Long COVID.



Figure: 05 > Skills, Values and Behaviours in Co-productive Care for Long COVID,
Created by author (2026)

Comprehensive Model of Personalized Care and Self-Management in Long COVID (UK)

- ❖ In the UK, the Comprehensive Model of Personalised Care focuses on delivering holistic and patient-centred care, which is essential in managing long-term conditions such as Post-COVID Syndrome. (NHS England,(2019); The King's Fund, (2021)
- ❖ Due to the complex and long-term nature of Post-COVID Syndrome, personalised care ensures that treatment is tailored to individual patient needs.
- ❖ Primary care professionals play a central role in coordinating these components to support holistic recovery and improve quality of life.

Comprehensive Model of Personalised Care and Self-Management in Long COVID (UK)



Adapted from NHS England (2019)

6 Components (with Long COVID connection)

1) **Shared Decision-Making**

Patients with Long COVID are included in decisions made about their care. The complexity and variance of symptoms means that this is particularly important

2) **Personalized Care and Support Planning**

Individual care plans are created based on symptoms such as fatigue, breathlessness, and mental health needs.

3) **Enabling Choice (Social Prescribing)**

Patients are referred to community services such as support groups and rehabilitation programmes to improve recovery.

4) **Supported Self-Management**

Patients are encouraged to manage their symptoms through pacing, lifestyle changes, and self-monitoring.

5) **Personal Health Budgets**

Some patients may receive financial support to access personalized treatments or rehabilitation services.

6) **Integrated Personalized Care**

Care is coordinated across primary care, community services, and specialist clinics to ensure continuity.

Conclusions:

- ✓ In conclusion, Post-COVID syndrome, also known as Long COVID, is a significant long-term condition that continues to affect a large number of individuals globally and in the UK. It presents with a wide range of persistent physical, cognitive, and psychological symptoms that can impact daily functioning and quality of life.
- ✓ As there is currently no single cure, effective management relies on a holistic, patient-centred, and multidisciplinary approach. Primary care and community healthcare professionals play a crucial role in early identification, ongoing monitoring, and coordination of care.
- ✓ Furthermore, the use of personalized care models, supported self-management, and rehabilitation services is essential in improving patient outcomes. Prevention strategies at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels also help reduce the long-term burden of the condition.
- ✓ Overall, addressing Post-COVID syndrome requires continuous support, integrated care, and a strong focus on individual patient needs to enhance recovery and quality of life.

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