What's it like when mental effects of COVID-19 fester?

Even people who were never sick enough to go to a hospital, much less lie in an ICU bed with a ventilator, report feeling something as ill-defined as "Covid fog" or as frightening as numbed limbs. They're unable to carry on with their lives, exhausted by crossing the street, fumbling for words, or laid low by depression, anxiety, or PTSD.

As many as 1 in 3 patients recovering from Covid-19 could experience neurological or psychological after-effects of their infections, experts told STAT, reflecting a growing consensus that the disease can have lasting impact on the brain. Beyond the fatigue felt by "long haulers" as they heal post-Covid, these neuropsychological problems range from headache, dizziness, and lingering loss of smell or taste to mood disorders and deeper cognitive impairment.

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Right now, there is little that researchers can say definitively about how best to prevent and treat neuropsychological manifestations of Covid-19. Nor do they know for certain why the brain is affected.

"It's sort of like you're trying to put out the fire and then a little bit later, you go look at the nervous system as the embers," said Victoria Pelak, professor of neurology and ophthalmology at the University of Colorado School of Medicine. "Because you are so concerned with the raging fire, you haven't really been able to pay attention to the nervous system as much as you normally would."

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