Viewpoint: ‘My body went haywire’ — One woman’s debilitating experience with long COVID

I didn’t know it was covid at the time. This was early February 2020, before the government was acknowledging SARS-CoV-2’s spread in the United States.

In the weeks after infection, my body went haywire. My ears rang. My heart would start galloping at random times. I developed violent new food allergies overnight. When I walked upstairs, I gasped alarmingly.

I reached out to doctors. One told me I was “deconditioned” and needed to exercise more. But my usual jog left me doubled over, and when I tried to lift weights, I ended up in the ER with chest pains and tachycardia. My tests were normal, which alarmed me further. How could they be normal? Every morning, I woke breathless, leaden, utterly depleted.

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We desperately need access to informed care, new treatments, fast-tracked research, safe spaces and disability protections. We also need a basic grasp of the facts of long covid. How it can follow anywhere from 10 to 30 percent of infections, How infections accumulate risk. How it’s not anxiety or depression, though its punishing nature can contribute to both those things. How children can get it; a recent review puts it at 12 to 16 percent of cases. How long-haulers who are reinfected usually get worse. How as many as 23 million Americans have post-covid symptoms, with that number increasing daily.

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