

COVID-19 and Cognitive Challenges

People with, and recovering from, COVID-19 can experience a host of different cognitive after-effects from the virus. Every day, speech-language pathologists (SLPs) are working to help people improve cognitive skills.



What Challenges Look Like: Among the most commonly reported challenges for COVID-19 “long-haulers” are persistent cognitive difficulties—often referred to as *brain fog*. Cognitive symptoms include difficulty with thinking; executive functioning (planning, organizing, and breaking down a larger task into smaller parts); problem solving; and decision making.

These challenges are especially concerning for long-haulers because many have shown to be otherwise healthy adults in the prime of their lives—with busy careers and active family lives. Initially, too, some people had (seemingly) mild cases of COVID-19.

For those patients who did experience a serious initial bout of illness—and who may have spent time on a ventilator and/or experienced low oxygen to the brain—their cognitive abilities may also suffer. Some experience *intensive care unit (ICU) delirium*, which can cause hospitalized patients to become confused and disoriented. ICU delirium is often temporary. However, for some people, cognitive issues will persist. In both cases, SLPs can help.

Why Cognition Is Critical: Without the ability to clearly think, learn, and problem solve, people are severely limited in their day-to-day activities. This can be devastating. Home, work, and social lives can all suffer.

How SLPs Help: SLPs individualize treatment based on the person’s challenges. SLPs use techniques to help people with remembering information, planning and problem solving, multitasking, following and maintaining a conversation, and more. Many techniques are similar to those used by SLPs to treat people with traumatic brain injury, concussion, stroke, and neurodegenerative illnesses.

Where to Find Help: SLPs work in settings that include hospitals, long- and short-term care facilities, private practices, and patients’ homes. Many SLPs are also providing their services via telehealth at this time. If you or your loved ones are experiencing any cognitive challenges, let your doctor know. They should be able to recommend an SLP.

You can also find a searchable database of SLPs at www.asha.org/profind. Check to see if your insurance covers COVID-related cognitive services.