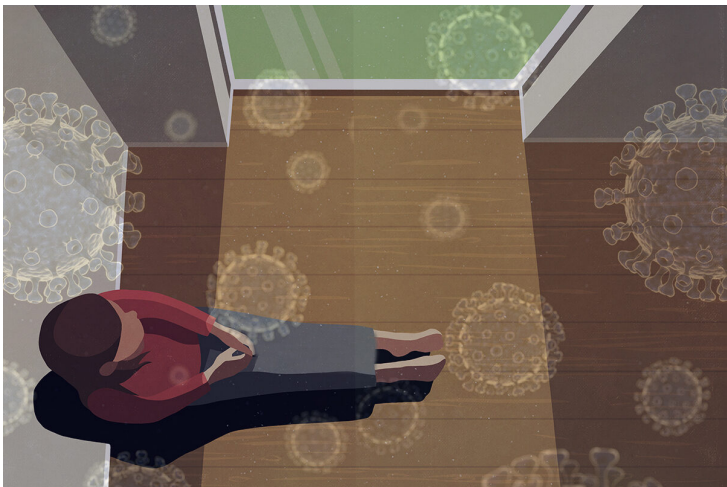


I'm a Single Jewish Mom. I've Had Covid-19 Symptoms for 6 Months. This Is My Story.

By Etti Hazan Oct 13, 2020



Most Covid-19 long-haulers count the weeks, not the days. I feel like I've had the virus so long that I stopped counting a long time ago. I recently did the math, however, and I am on week 27 or 28 of this terrible virus, depending on how you count.

For months now, I have contended with a wide range of symptoms, including chest pain and tenderness, shortness of breath, random bruising, and sinus flare-ups. I never had asthma, but these days, I'm regularly using an inhaler. My sense of smell comes and goes; currently, a variety of foods taste like soap.

For a time, I visited the doctor every week. Long-term symptoms were not well-known when I first got Covid-19, so the doctors were as puzzled as I was. So many of my acquaintances had fully healed from the virus, it felt strange to have symptoms so long after no longer testing positive. I began to search for like-minded communities online, and finally found a Facebook group called Long Haul COVID Fighters - Round 1 (80 Days+), composed of thousands of people of all ages with a variety of symptoms, some as mild as mine and others far more serious and threatening.

According to a CDC report in July, 35 % of symptomatic adults who had tested positive for Covid-19 said they had not returned to their usual state of health two to three weeks after their tests. Many have had symptoms persist for months. As David Putrino, a neuroscientist and a rehabilitation specialist at New York's Mount Sinai Hospital told the Atlantic, most of these long-haulers are women. Their average age is 44, and most were previously healthy and fit. (As for me, I turned 39 just prior to the pandemic and I, too, was previously healthy.)

As the single mom of two spirited girls, ages 10 and 13, dealing with months of coronavirus has been quite the adventure. Any single parent will tell you, the most difficult part is having to carry the full emotional burden that comes with running a household – there's no other adult present with whom to share these tasks, both large and small. Handling the day-to-day routines and difficulties that come up is challenging enough in normal times; when you're out of commission due to Covid-19, it's a nearly impossible feat.

Here's how my Covid-19 story began: I started feeling sluggish in the middle of the day on April 2. I had to force myself to complete my work. My mouth was numb and I felt very foggy; it was almost as if I was having an out-of-body experience and it was very confusing.

Remarkably, after that day, I was OK until April 8, Passover. I was unable to raise my voice while reading from the Haggadah at home, and then I was up most of the night with fever and chills.

Usually, I travel with my daughters to Rhode Island to spend Passover with my sister and her family. But this year, due to the pandemic, we were staying home in Brooklyn. I covered my kitchen counters, bought a very cheap set of pots, splurged on Passover snacks for the kids, and ordered bargain books online.

I grated horseradish and made chicken soup and set up the seder plate using my daughter's chart she had prepared in Zoom school. I started the seder – and then I got sick. I made it to the end and crawled into bed. The next three days were hazy; I had a fever and was extremely weak. The virus had swooped in and depleted any energy I had left after Pesach prep. I lay in bed all day staring at the wall or trying to read a bit. Occasionally, I got up to break up fights, leaning against the door as I begged the girls to behave.

That first day, following the seder, I knew we had some defrosted ground beef in the fridge that had to be put to use before it went bad. I sat at the kitchen table with my head down on my folded arms, feeling awful, and instructed the girls on how to cook it with tomatoes. The girls giggled as they cooked the meat and chopped some vegetables for salad, then enjoyed the food while I rested.

For the second seder on Thursday night, my 9-year-old prepared the seder plate and led the entire thing, even carrying on after her older sister gave up and went off to read. I watched from the couch, slowly nibbling on some avocado. I didn't have any appetite.

On Sunday, I was still weak. I was experiencing heart palpitations for the first time in my life, and I also lost my sense of taste and smell. I called Hatzalah – a volunteer EMS that serves Jewish communities – because they knew what to do. The volunteers stayed on the phone with their advising doctor, while they checked my vitals and relayed my symptoms to him.

Hatzalah of Crown Heights followed up with me on a daily basis and coordinated with the doctor and nurses after my first appointment was held over the phone. They were very experienced in dealing with coronavirus, having already ridden the big wave which came after Purim. From then on, I paid frequent visits to my doctor's clinic, which had a separate entrance for Covid-19 patients.

The past few months have been a bumpy ride. These days, I am able to walk around the neighborhood with my daughters and enjoy the fall weather. I have regained most of my strength, though some days are better than others. My recovery has been very slow, and coming in fits and starts. The virus is strange – you wake up thinking you're better, only to collapse an hour later. I have never experienced such weakness and exhaustion.

Over the past few months, my girls have learned to expect a little less from their mom, depending on how I am feeling on a particular day or week. They now pitch in more with chores and help run quick errands. Meanwhile, they recently started in-person school, wearing their masks all day. One of them is in a new

school, which brings a whole set of new challenges for a young teenager, but so far the staff and students have been very friendly and supportive. I hope their schools will manage to stay open in these turbulent times.

True, I never had it bad compared to the Covid patients who needed supplemental oxygen or hospitalization, to say nothing of the 200,000-plus Americans who have succumbed to the virus. I had shivering and heart palpitations, spent many days in bed (while making sure to walk around every hour to avoid blood clots), and relied on the kindness of friends and relatives for food and errands. I had tremendous sinus pressure that stayed for weeks, and I had a lingering, taunting cough.

These days, with cases rising again in various parts of NYC, I hope we will all continue to do the right thing. I am proof that even mild cases of Covid-19 have the potential to wreak havoc in our bodies and linger for an indeterminate amount of time. Staying home, staying apart from others, and wearing masks whenever we leave the house isn't fun, but it's a new world to which many of us will have to adapt in order to somehow carry on.

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