

LOCAL NEWS

'Brain fog' after coronavirus infection may indicate cognitive decline

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HOUSTON - [Imperial College London](#) found that in some severe cases, the coronavirus is linked to substantial cognitive deficits for months. Researchers said the impact was equal to a 10-year decline.

Are local doctors seeing this?

Yes.

"Many people complain of what they call brain fog, they're having trouble focusing, they're having confusion," said Dr. Gerard Francisco, chair of the department of physical medicine and rehabilitation with McGovern Medical School at UT Health and chief medical officer at TIRR Memorial Hermann. "Which is

quite disturbing because while they have recovered physically, mentally, they have not, and just imagine the toll on this person's psychological well being."

Dr. Francisco said whether you're young and healthy or older with a chronic illness, anyone may be susceptible to this side effect.

"The severity of the initial presentation of coronavirus infection does not correlate with the development of brain fog," Dr. Francisco said. "In fact, there are many people who complained of brain fog who had very mild symptoms, they thought that they had recovered physically from it and maybe they will still experience some fatigue. However, this brain fog, the confusion and memory problems may last longer."

So the question remains - Will it go away?

"If we are to extrapolate what we have learned from the SARS and MERS epidemics and pandemics many years ago," he said. "Some of them have had the problems for many years, while others recovered within a few weeks or a few months."

At TIRR, Dr. Francisco is working with COVID patients, much like stroke or traumatic brain injury patients, who lose brain function.

He said there are likely more COVID patients suffering from this complication who haven't realized what it was or consider it so minor that they are not getting treatment. However, if they hope to regain cognitive function after an infection, he encourages patients to seek professional help.

"I think it's well worth trying what we know has worked for people with other neurological conditions and that might help people recovering from COVID," he said.

What's next?

The truth is, while evidence suggests this is a complication of coronavirus, time may determine that other medical conditions are at play.

Dr. Francisco said the most important next step is determining to whom, why and how these complications are happening.

Until doctors can determine exactly what is a long-term complication and what is something that might go away, they cannot successfully treat everyone.

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