

# POST COVID EFFECTS: IRRITABLE SYNDROME FROM BAD TO WORST

Jibran Umar Ayub Khan<sup>1</sup>, Ayesha Qaisar<sup>2</sup>, Azhar Zahir Shah<sup>1</sup>, Shoaib Subhan<sup>1</sup>

Since the emergence of COVID-19, world has witnessed a major catastrophe in the terms of enhanced burden on health resources, burnout of health professionals and most importantly loss of precious human lives. <sup>1</sup>The psychological health of patients, their relatives and carers has been a huge concern that has also led to escalation of gastrointestinal symptoms. In addition there is an established relationship between mental health and the diseases such as irritable bowel syndrome which is largely functional bowel disorder more common in people having underlying depression. The COVID 19 has been the culprit of multiple problems that has added to the misery of such patients.

Over the last two years, there is huge influx of irritable bowel syndrome patients to gastrointestinal clinics. They do present with typical symptoms such as diarrhoea alternating with constipation, troublesome bloating and flatulence.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes alarm symptoms have warranted invasive investigations like CT Abdomen and colonoscopy. Post infectious IBS isn't something new and was first explained by Stewart in 1959 who did explain the persistence of symptoms after recovering from infection. <sup>3</sup>They can be residual symptoms of the infection themselves like gastroenteritis or due to overwhelming and negative thoughts of the patient who has just recovered. Acute GI problems have been reported to affect 17% of patients. The symptoms are more common at 6 months affecting 43% of patients. <sup>4</sup>This is a worrisome figure as most the patients are having the symptoms for months to years.

- 
1. Kabir Medical College Peshawar, Pakistan
  2. Khyber Medical College Peshawar, Pakistan

---

## Address for Correspondence

**Dr. Ayesha Qaisar**

Department of Physiology, Khyber Medical College (KMC), Peshawar, Pakistan  
[dr.ayshaqaiser@hotmail.com](mailto:dr.ayshaqaiser@hotmail.com)

Almost all age groups are the victims of COVID and post infectious IBS. It has been observed more in young people especially students who are already stressed about exhaustive routine, meeting essential deadlines, and appearing for exam with suboptimum academic calendar year. There has been an increased burden on them as they are not acclimatized to online learning. Though online learning is non inferior to group education for irritable bowel syndrome according to a randomized controlled and patient preference trial, the enormous stress by itself is the major trigger for it. In addition we have seen the increased trend of IBS symptoms in middle aged females who have to look after their homes. Sir Arthur Hurst (1943) introduced a term "Post-dysenteric colonic irritability". The gastrointestinal symptoms have been exaggerated in functional bowel disorders with increased medication use. The major problem is that most of the symptoms have been found refractory to conventional treatment. This has been especially more noticeable in our country where people are mostly suffering from worst economic turmoil and have large families to cater for. There has been massive downsizing in most of the organization or people are working on half salaries that has added to the problem further complicating it.

Post COVID IBS is a major global problem and gut brain relationship has been altered to a colossal extent. The virus by itself has caused millions of deaths worldwide and hence one expects the trauma of the survivors has been manifold as well. Post traumatic stress hospitalisation has been reported. Two studies have reported it to be 42.1% and 96.2%, both alarming figures. <sup>5</sup>Studies of post-traumatic stress and IBS have reported that about one third of patients may experience flashbacks, worst night terrors, disturbed sleep and low mood, all major triggers for IBS as well. The care of such patients has been very challenging.

So in conclusion as we still recover from the major disaster of COVID 19, there needs to be effective treatment for functional bowel disorders especially irritable bowel syndrome as they comprise of more than half of gastrointestinal consultations. <sup>6</sup>There needs to be a well directed multidisciplinary approach involving gastroenterologists, primary care

physicians, psychiatrists and psychologists for managing such patients. Merely cognitive behavioural therapy and FODMAP diet won't suffice. Post COVID IBS is a difficult case scenario to manage but when there is a will there is a way.

#### References:

1. Milibari AA. iMedPub Journals Current Situation of Coronavirus Disease : Albaraa A Milibari \*. 2020;10–3.
2. Ghoshal UC, Ghoshal U, Rahman MM, Mathur A, Rai S, Akhter M, et al. Post-infection functional gastrointestinal disorders following coronavirus disease-19: A case–control study. *J Gastroenterol Hepatol.* 2022;37(3):489–98.
3. Cuomo R, Savarese MF, Gargano R. Almost all irritable bowel syndromes are post-infectious and respond to probiotics: Consensus issues. *Dig Dis.* 2007;25(3):241–4.
4. HH H. Mysteries of Irritable Bowel Syndrome: Post Infections and Psychophysiological Reactions. *Gastroenterol Hepatol Res.* 2018;3(2):1–5.
5. Bonazza F, Luridiana Battistini C, Fior G, Bergamelli E, Wiedenmann F, D'Agostino A, et al. Recovering from COVID-19: psychological sequelae and post-traumatic growth six months after discharge. *Eur J Psychotraumatol.* 2022;13(1).
6. Choudhury A, Tariq R, Jena A, Vesely EK, Singh S, Khanna S, et al. Gastrointestinal manifestations of long COVID: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Therap Adv Gastroenterol.* 2022;15:175628482211184.